

IN BRIGHTER COLORS:
FAUVIST INFLUENCES AND GENDER POLITICS IN THE ART OF
GABRIELE MÜNTER

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Master of Arts
in the Department of History,
Indiana University

September 2016

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University, in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

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Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my mother, who selflessly devoted countless hours to reading each and every line along the way, from its fledgling stages to its completion.

Acknowledgments

I offer my most heartfelt thanks and appreciation for the guidance, instruction, and encouragement offered by my thesis committee during this process. First, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my committee chair, Dr. Kevin C. Robbins, whose unwavering support sustained my enthusiasm for this project. Without his thorough guidance, remarkable expertise, and endless patience, my thesis would be sorely incomplete. I would also like to earnestly thank my other committee members, Dr. Kevin Cramer and Dr. Jean Robertson, for their perceptive questions and insightful commentaries that have sharpened and refined my thesis.

I recognize that my research on this subject would not have been possible without the generous financial assistance provided by the IUPUI Max Kade German-American Center. My most sincere thanks to the IUPUI Max Kade Center Director, Dr. Karen Roesch, and Associate Director, Dr. Claudia Grossmann, for their support of my research.

Additionally, I would like to extend wholeheartedly my appreciation to Suzanne Ziegler, who offered me hospitality, friendship, and a home in Munich, Germany during my summer research travels in 2014 and 2015. *Vielen Dank!*

I am forever indebted to my family for their ongoing encouragement as I completed my degree. From the day I began my graduate program to the day I defended my thesis, they have never failed to offer kindness and support. Finally, I would like to thank my husband, Jimmy, who heard my ideas, eased my doubts, and celebrated my victories.

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Gabriele Münter (1877-1962) was a primary member of the twentieth-century German Expressionist group *Der Blaue Reiter* (The Blue Rider). This thesis examines the stylistic intersection between avant-garde French Fauvism and German Expressionism in Gabriele Münter's substantial oeuvre. Her body of work demonstrates an unmistakable affiliation with modern French aesthetic inclinations, a distinctive characteristic that confirms Münter's intrinsic comprehension of innovative artistic principles in creative communities across Europe. To contextualize the analysis of Münter's stylistic experimentation, this thesis illuminates the development and maturation of German feminine artistic culture from 1900 to 1933.

Kevin C. Robbins, Ph.D., Chair

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Introduction

My pictures are all moments of my life... instantaneous visual experiences, generally noted very rapidly and spontaneously. When I begin to paint, it's like leaping suddenly into deep waters, and I never know beforehand whether I will be able to swim...¹

- Gabriele Münter

This thesis is concerned with deciphering the semiotics of womanhood and defining the stylistic influences of avant-garde French Fauvism in the artwork of female German Expressionist Gabriele Münter (1877-1962). It seeks to illuminate the nature of German feminine artistic culture beginning in 1900 through the Weimar Republic (1919-1933). I concentrate on exposing relationships between cultural perceptions of femininity in all its variations, a powerful force in preserving boundaries of familial traditionalism², and the visual depictions of femininity created by Gabriele Münter. In the latter portion of this thesis, I analyze the massive shift in post-war masculine culture, in representations of the collapse of hegemonic virility in artwork by notable male and female Expressionists. I believe this analysis is crucial to understanding the disparities between and inherent biases of male and female artists and their principles in post-war Germany. This broad, global view allows for a more comprehensive analysis of Münter, both as an artist and as a woman, against the backdrop of anxieties regarding the emancipated, independent New Woman in the 1920s. Concerns about man's "flawed" and deviant sexuality and the vulnerability of women on the homefront who sacrificed men to the war machine permeated German culture after 1918. These deeply important themes are crucial to comprehending Münter as a woman and an artist in twentieth-century Germany. While this thesis is an investigation primarily of Münter's artistic contributions, I believe it is essential to include these relevant

¹ Edouard Roditi, *Dialogues: Conversations with European Artists at Mid-Century* (San Francisco: Bedford Arts, 1990), 112.

² Defined as one father, the primary breadwinner, one mother, the homemaker, and their children.

topics to understand better the cultural milieu that dictated the direction and development of Mnter's Expressionism.

The term "Expressionism" is notoriously difficult to define. The movement experienced many geographic variations. Artists in German-speaking countries, Austria and Switzerland experimented with variations of Expressionism. These different manifestations of Expressionisms varied stylistically. Artistic divisions of style resulted in the movement's aesthetic stratification. Despite these stylistic differences, the unifying concept that art should result from the artist's inner emotional experience, rather than external observations of the outside world, consolidated these modern, introspective artists as "Expressionists".

Expressionism sought to examine human emotion and experience, react to tradition, culture, reject outdated aesthetic canons, and emphasize stylistic abstraction. An Austrian author and playwright, Hermann Bahr, defined Expressionism this way:

Never was an epoch so shaken by horror and the dread of death. Never was the world so plunged in the silence of the grave. Never was man so small. Never was he so afraid. Never was joy so distant and freedom so dead. Now distress cries out: man cries out for his soul; the whole epoch becomes one cry of distress. Art joins in the cry: it cries into the black depths, cries for help, cries for the spirit: *that is Expressionism*.³

Its primary unifying characteristic (and this includes literary and musical Expressionisms) consists of an over-intensification of personal, sensual experience, a distortion and exaggeration bordering on the hysterical, a shattering of traditional forms and the reordering of the fragments to make vehicles for changed thinking and sensation. Expressionism embodies a new, more critical and emphatic approach to the world.

Expressionism places substantial emphasis upon the individual: individual representation and emotion, rather than communal experience and conflict. Alessandra

³ Hermann Bahr, *Der Expressionismus* (Munich: 1916) quoted in Kristian Sotriffer, *Expressionism and Fauvism*, trans. Richard Rickett (New York: McGraw Hill Book Company, 1972), 6.

Comini, author of the article “Gender or Genius?: The Women Artists of German Expressionism”, argues that individualism established the necessary foundation upon which Expressionism could thrive:

The theme of the time was the individual in society; its meaning was, according to the interpreter, objectively or subjectively rendered; its applications either universal or private. Determinism seemed a universal fate, pessimism or stubborn faith the only qualifiers.⁴

Understanding the weight of individualism here is crucial to comprehending the motivations of Expressionism and its female artists. The movement provided enterprising women artists a rare opportunity to define their individual identities in a manner that suited their perceptions of themselves. In this way, women artists defied historical and prescriptive expectations placed upon them by hegemonic, patriarchal social institutions. By promoting their individuality, women Expressionists and their artistic output became more visible to the masculine population stubbornly resistant to women’s professional and cultural emancipation. Increased levels of visibility, especially in the artistic circles of modern Germany, often resulted in greater public legitimacy.

Articulating individuality became foundational to artists’ practice of Expressionism. The two major schools of German Expressionism, *Die Brücke*, or The Bridge (1905-1913) and *Der Blaue Reiter*, or The Blue Rider (1911-1914), concentrated on illustrating the inherent complexities of human emotion and visceral responses to external stimuli. To do this, each school developed an inventory of visual symbols to communicate these emotions, thoughts, and reactions via color, form, and subject matter. *Die Brücke* focused on exploring crude, primitive worlds beyond the urban landscape. The second school, *Der Blaue Reiter*, founded

⁴ Alessandra Comini, “Gender or Genius?: the Women Artists of German Expressionism,” in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*, eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 271-291.

in 1911 by Russian émigré Wassily Kandinsky, German artist Franz Marc, and Gabriele Münter, contemplated metaphysical questions, human and animal spirituality, and chromatic symbolism.

In this study, I focus primarily on the work of *Der Blaue Reiter*. Collectively, *Der Blaue Reiter* sought to challenge traditional, objective depictions of the external world. The Expressionists of *Der Blaue Reiter* emphasized both formal and chromatic abstraction to investigate the human psyche. As a result of their progressive ideology and bold experimentation, *Der Blaue Reiter* became one of the most modern and controversial art movements in early twentieth-century Germany.

The founding members of *Der Blaue Reiter* desired to illustrate the permanent tension between inner and outer worlds: the inner world of the human psyche and the outer world of surrounding society and culture. Much of their inspiration came from scientific advancements made by Max Planck and Albert Einstein, which began to reveal the infinitely expanding, constantly dynamic universe. As contemporary scientists explored the depths of the vast universe, the Expressionists examined the depths of the boundless human psyche.

The illusory world of objectivity was opposed by the vision of a more comprehensive truth, the ‘universe of the interior.’ The ‘distortion of nature,’ as the process of conversion was called, was taken as a metaphysical rather than a formal necessity. ‘Instinct is worth ten times more than knowledge,’ said Emil Nolde on behalf of fellow battlers. Like him, they were convinced that the sole function of the work of art was to express a powerful sense of life and to interpret the concepts of ‘man’ and ‘reality.’ This attitude led to an aloofness from nature and an end to description. Instead, painters sought the ‘great secret’ to which the reality of visible being must subordinate itself to keep from blocking the artist’s path to the heart of things.⁵

Unlike nineteenth-century French Impressionism, which represented observations made in the public arena, Expressionism liberated the hidden, turbulent inner world of

⁵ Paul Vogt, *The Blue Rider* (Woodbury, NY: Barrons Educational Series, Inc. 1980), 2.

human emotion and spirituality. Primarily, Expressionists represented visually their personal, authentic convictions and anxieties regarding societal upheavals, politics, and war. Twentieth-century German social turmoil, most notably fluctuating gender roles and post-war hysteria, incited artistic reaction.

To explain these reactions to shifting gender expectations and perceptions, I investigate the components of Weimar feminism and the New Woman in twentieth-century Germany. Chapter one examines the development of the most important cultural ideologies surrounding Western womanhood. These include the desire for a woman to remain in the home, raise children with a husband, and maintain domestic stability. To balance this investigation, I will include a brief synopsis of the advancement of women's freedoms in the United States. I do this for two reasons. First, Gabriele Münter spent two years in her early twenties in the United States, exposed to these American ideologies of gender. Second, I believe it is necessary to establish that this anxiety regarding a woman's role in the home and society was a pervasive Western phenomenon, rather than a school of thought unique to Germany. Even in these two countries, which experienced a great deal of animosity toward each other in the early 1900s, similar ideologies arose pertaining to women, their rights, and their futures.

In chapter two, I focus my discussion on Gabriele Münter's primary iconographies of German femininity from 1907 to 1917. To contextualize this discussion, I examine her artistic development, her relationship with Wassily Kandinsky, and her self-imposed exile in Scandinavia during the First World War. Münter's symbolic representations of pre-war femininity highlight women's increasing governance over their own bodies and appearances. Conversely, her wartime images of womanhood epitomize feminine vulnerability and sacrifice during the conflict.

In the third chapter, I direct my attention specifically toward highlighting the Fauvist influences in the paintings of Gabriele Münter. I begin my chronological investigation of Münter's Fauvist foundations in 1900, and end my discussion in the 1930s. This protracted examination is essential to understanding fundamental Fauvist themes in Münter's complete oeuvre. While Gabriele Münter is a co-founder of the Expressionist movement, *Der Blaue Reiter*, I believe that her ability to merge seamlessly both Expressionistic techniques with those of the Fauves demonstrates her broad and innovative creative scope. What elements of Münter's artwork make her a Fauve? Were these techniques recognized at the time? What evidence suggests that Münter actually emulated Fauve practices? Examining several key pieces from her oeuvre is essential to illustrate the Fauve trends that Münter so beautifully embodied and modified in her aesthetic choices.

In the final chapter, I examine the role of Expressionism in the redefinition and reinterpretation of post-war gender norms and expectations. I frame this analysis by outlining the chaotic aftermath of the First World War. In this section, I examine Germany's intensifying apprehension regarding its place in the European and world economies after being saddled with financially crippling reparations payments. Additionally, I examine Germany's concern with women's imminent emancipation. How did post-war culture sculpt a new masculinity and how was it supposedly contested by modern German feminism? How does this discussion contribute to a greater understanding of Münter and her artwork? Furthermore, what evidence in Münter's post-war artwork reveals her perceptions of women's growing autonomy and visibility in society?

To begin this lengthy analysis of the reshaping of twentieth-century German gender politics, I first discuss the traditional gender norms and expectations of nineteenth-century

Europe in order to contextualize thoroughly Gabriele Münter's unique development as a modern, progressive female artist.

The Dilemma of German Womanhood

In 1879, fervent criticism stormed Scandinavian stages in response to Henrik Ibsen's counter-cultural play *A Doll's House*. This tempest of condemnation sprang from the highly-offensive plot line in which Nora Helmer, the female protagonist, leaves her cosseted maternal existence to pursue her own destiny beyond domesticity. She tries to escape from the oppression of her condescending but faithful husband, Torvald. Not only did Ibsen challenge traditional marital roles with this groundbreaking production, but he also presented a socially unconventional idea: women leaving an established environment of domestic life to pursue ambitious, autonomous endeavors. Once the play hit German stages in 1880, overwhelming criticism forced Ibsen to rewrite the ending. In this alternate conclusion, Ibsen reluctantly imagines that Torvald Helmer persuades an aggravated Nora to look upon the sweet faces of their sleeping children as she attempts her dramatic departure. As she contemplates them, she realizes she is unable to leave, and her travelling bag drops from her hand as she collapses on the stage. The curtain falls, and masculine supremacy reasserts itself, once more preserving the sanctity of *Kirche, Küche, Kinder* (Church, Kitchen, Children).⁶ The woman remains where she belongs: in the home.

In the winter of 1889, an unaltered version of the play appeared on Berlin stages. This sensational production aroused criticism once more. Six months after the Berlin performances, Konrad Alberti, editor of the *Berliner Morgenpost*, wrote that Ibsen's production inspired a troublesome phenomenon among modern, urban wives and mothers that he called "Noramania".⁷ Now that metropolitan German wives had seen a fictitious heroine abandon her domestic duties in favor of autonomy, they became captivated by the counter-

⁶ Peter Watts, introduction to *A Doll's House and Other Plays*, by Henrik Ibsen (London: the Penguin Group, 1965), 18.

⁷ Katherine Roper, *German Encounters with Modernity: Novels of Imperial Berlin* (London: Humanities Press International, Inc., 1991), 164.

cultural idea. In an 1890 article entitled “The Woman and Reality” (*Die Frau und der Realismus*), Alberti claimed that the play caused a pattern of immature and reckless behavior among women in Berlin. Alberti castigated harshly women’s burgeoning desires to leave the home to pursue independent endeavors. According to historian Katherine Roper, Alberti believed that “[by] accepting the marriage contract, a woman pledged ‘her existence’ to the man who promised to support her and thereby renounced any claim to an independent will.”⁸ After marriage, women relinquished all potential opportunities to pursue autonomy outside of the home.

According to many nineteenth-century male social theorists, a woman’s role in the home acted as the most crucial contributing factor to her development as a constructive civic and civilizing agent. Her domestic presence ensured the preservation of a traditional, stable, normative, culturally acceptable family. She acted as the historical anchor, a reassuring guarantor of conventionality. A woman abandoning her maternal and domestic duties in pursuit of self-governance shattered this comforting ideal. That fugitive, immoral act destroyed familial relationships, and at worst, entire societies. Women could not be trusted with independence. When a woman chose freedom above her family, she became dangerous.

Middle class and upper middle class families became mostly responsible for maintaining this rigid, yet respectable, status quo. Most commonly, lower class families relied upon the mother’s labor outside the home to remain financially stable. However, in more radical circles, many believed that abolishing class divisions, and allowing all women to take part in industrial production would grant women freedom and equality with men. German philosopher Friedrich Engels championed this belief.

⁸ Ibid., 164.

The emancipation of women and their equality with men are impossible and must remain so as long as women are excluded from socially productive work and restricted to housework, which is private. The emancipation of women becomes possible only when women are enabled to take part in production on a large, social scale, and when domestic duties require their attention only to a minor degree.⁹

More traditional or conventional views of the family typically construed the father as the sole source of income for the family, relegating the mother to childcare alone. This bourgeois ideal of motherhood emerged primarily as an urban phenomenon. Outside of cities in agrarian societies, women's inescapable work at home and in the fields or workshops ensured peasant family survival.

The Western endeavor to indoctrinate young, bourgeois women into the sphere of domesticity consistently encountered resistance. In both Europe and North America, men, often policemen, applied multiple fetters to prevent women from gaining any "unnecessary" freedoms, like the ability to go out alone after dark. In Germany, women could not easily enter public spaces independently. Leaving the home became permissible if a man accompanied a woman. Traditionally, bourgeois women's culture remained private, hidden and centralized within the four walls of their own homes. If a woman sought to enter into public spaces, primarily a man's territory, she dressed herself appropriately, wearing demure clothing that would not attract any unnecessary stares. She also needed to have an acceptable destination in mind. Many husbands disallowed their wives to leave the home for leisure. If a woman refused to adhere to these guidelines, she could be vilified for "indecent", even "wanton" display.

Many argue that, unlike the flâneur [urban male observers of life], the female pedestrian cannot walk in the city idly or detached. The loitering woman exposes herself to the charge of prostitution, and the woman who walks with purpose reveals herself as a shopper and therefore lacks the necessary

⁹ Friedrich Engels, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (Chippendale, Australia: Resistance Books, 2004), 151, accessed February 19, 2016, Google Books.

detachment from the material things of life. Overall, as the quintessential objects of male gaze, women are generally viewed as part of the cityscape and, therefore, are not thought to have mastery of it.¹⁰

Traditionally, men considered most women peripheral objects in the social landscape, and therefore did not regard them as valuable, visible members of European society. This pervasive male ideology reinforced social gender divisions (men in public and women in private), as well as the belief that women's identities could solely be generated and verified by domestic life.

Nevertheless, enterprising European women utilized their errands outside of the home as opportunities to observe and inspect public social zones. Common errands included shopping ventures, walking the family dog, or accompanying their children outside to play and explore. These external endeavors gave women the opportunity to construct and reshape their individual identities beyond the isolation of the home. Their familiarization with domesticity became supplemented by a growing understanding of the public areas around their homes. Women began the process of assimilation into modern, public, masculine culture.

In order to navigate these public spaces open to them adroitly and in relative safety, many middle class women devised internal inventories of appropriate social customs and expressions. These private, inaudible, customized guides allowed women to decode and understand social interactions and behavior. As a result, shrewd and savvy women assimilated carefully into masculine, social spheres wholly or partially undetected. Whether solitary or accompanied by male family members or female friends, women accumulated vast networks of information to covertly adapt to their volatile surroundings. By surreptitiously

¹⁰ Karin Baumgartner, "Constructing Paris: Flânerie, Female Spectatorship, and the Discourses of Fashion in 'Französische Miscellen' (1803)," *Monatshefte* 100, no. 3 (Fall 2008), 353, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30165577>.

immersing themselves in public, metropolitan culture, women learned to recognize proper behavior and speech between the sexes, appropriate apparel, and how to employ these social requirements successfully in urban environments.

Gabriele Münter's street imagery reveals subtly women's exploration of public spaces. *Hapsburg Square, Munich* (1911) and *Street in Stockholm* (1916) capture the movements and behaviors of women outside of domesticity. *Hapsburg Square, Munich* features an elegant urban mother or governess clutching the hand of a young boy as they explore the streets of Munich together. The pair pauses momentarily to watch two black dogs playing on the busy street. The woman's relaxed form suggests that she has encountered these animals before, and knows that they pose no immediate threat to the child.

In this image, Münter fuses maternal, domestic life with public, urban life. The woman figure seems to be comfortable with the city, likely from previous solitary wanderings. She represents two worlds for the child and for the viewer. As a mother or a governess, she acts as a conduit between the private, interior spaces of the home and the urban, public zones. Notably, it seems that the child's earliest lessons about public spaces came from a woman, rather than a man.

In a later image, *Street in Stockholm* from 1916, Münter depicts a solitary woman strolling down a bustling Swedish street with her tiny dog. She is dressed fashionably, pairing a dark wide-brimmed hat with a luxuriously long, black coat, fitted snugly around her slender waist. The woman's hat allows her to conceal covert glances directed toward fellow pedestrians. From our vantage point, we cannot see the woman's face at all, allowing her identity to remain a mystery. This is a recurring theme in many of Münter's paintings of women in public spaces. In multiple urban and suburban scenes, Münter does not paint the

defining characteristics of her subjects in order to preserve anonymity.¹¹ She enables her featureless figures to pass through scenes without being recognized. In turn, these anonymous women create their own individual personality and character outside of the painting's context. Women could explore, learn, and watch the public spaces without fear of identification. These intrepid female spectators became known as *flâneuses*.

However, the use of the French term *flâneuse* or *flânerie* to describe these twentieth-century German women is problematic for two reasons. First, the term is linked inherently to nineteenth-century Parisian modernity. *Flâneurs*, insightful, observant, urban male spectators became synonymous with nineteenth-century Paris, icons of leisure and consumer culture. Charles Baudelaire immortalized *flâneurs* in his essay "The Painter of Modern Life" (1863).

For the perfect *flâneur*, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world – such are a few of the slightest pleasures of those independent, passionate, impartial natures which the tongue can but clumsily define...or the lover of pictures who lives in a magical society of dreams painted on canvas...or we might liken him to a mirror as vast as the crowd itself; or to a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness, responding to each one of its movements and reproducing the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life.¹²

The original term, *flâneur*, denotes male independence and autonomy. Male *flâneurs* experienced a high level of freedom, able to navigate urban streets and meander through crowds without fear of persecution. Women did not share this privilege. Despite this, I do not believe that *flâneuse* is an inaccurate term to employ when discussing these avant-garde female spectators. In my opinion, utilizing the French name for these urban spectators

¹¹ *Snow and Sun* (1911) and *Farmyard in Snow I* (1911) exemplify this artistic convention.

¹² Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, ed. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1995), 9.

reinforces the cultural, artistic, and social interchanges between Germany and France. The reciprocal interplay between the two countries is of supreme importance to this study.

Like France, the United States influenced profoundly the evolution of German gender ideals. American standards of “proper” female behavior strongly affected latter nineteenth-century German women’s culture. Historian Thomas Elsaesser asserts,

Related to the sociological concerns about (middle class) women joining the labor force, was public ambivalence about androgyny (often a code word for same sex relations), which in turn, often blended with an ambivalence about ‘Americanitis’, the influence on the United States on female role-models, especially via the cinema. It seems that in Germany, it was the greater mobility between home and work of the American woman that was admired and envied, but also feared and rejected.¹³

Simultaneously, gender norms in the United States sought to emphasize traditional limitations on women’s access to the public sphere and expressive freedoms therein. Religion acted as the fundamental motivating stimulus for this thought process. Patriarchal, American, Christian religious authorities established boundaries around women in order to maintain Biblical principles for marriage and scripturally appropriate social interactions between males and females. Earlier American constructions of gender relied heavily on distinct separation of the sexes, in both the spaces they occupied and the roles they played. Gender boundaries remained heavily policed to ensure that no man or woman could defect from their culturally-ascribed duties as male or female. French anthropologist and author Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) demonstrated that men guarded collectively these two gender “pathways”, and disallowed women to participate in external family matters, communal businesses serving the public, or the political arena.¹⁴ Such male “guardians”

¹³ Thomas Elsaesser, “The Camera in the Kitchen: Grete Schütte-Lihotsky and Domestic Modernity,” in *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Christiane Schönfeld (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 33.

¹⁴ Ouida, “The New Woman,” *The North American Review* 158, no. 450 (1894): 62, accessed December 15, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25103333>.

have asserted that the primary goal should be to allow a woman to preserve her precious, fragile, inherently vulnerable femininity.

According to restrictive nineteenth-century cultural ideologies, pursuing an education acted as an effective method for a woman to sacrifice her femininity. Women faced critical male objections if they decided to pursue intellectual endeavors. These sorts of criticisms and complaints formed just a few of the boundaries placed around women by patriarchal, American and European bourgeois society in order to keep them within domestic spaces. In an 1810 essay entitled “Education and Instruction of the Female Sex: A Book for Parents and Educators”, German feminist Betty Gleim wrote:

No one will have any objections to moral and religious education, but all the more voices will be raised against the intellectual and the aesthetic. The objections that one hears are:

First: through cultivation, especially intellectual cultivation, the woman loses her femininity.

Second: Intellectual and aesthetic education prevent the woman from any faithful fulfillment of duty because her inclinations are not taken into account.

Third: Such education especially prevents the fulfillment of her duties as a wife, mother, and housewife.¹⁵

Restrictive, patriarchal Western cultures adhered to these principles, particularly in Germany and in the United States. These two countries became crucial to the artistic development of Gabriele Münter’s expressive, personal style. According to these stultifying German and American traditions, women who sought to explore intellectual cultivation and aesthetic creativity were either disregarded as talentless traitors to the household or as depraved schemers merely seeking marital security in a man’s world. A professional, well-educated woman emerged as the mysterious “third sex”, without a clear place in society. This viewpoint became aggravated further by the concept that women easily became bitter

¹⁵ Betty Gleim, “Education and Instruction of the Female Sex: A Book for Parents and Educators,” in *German Feminist Writings*, Patricia A. Herminghouse and Magda Mueller, eds. (New York: The Continuum International Publishing Group: 2001), 14.

and mannish once in the professional arena. Occasional exceptions were made, but only temporarily. For example, if a woman pursued a skilled career like art, her family funded the endeavor until she became eligible for marriage. Families intended this venture to be a brief solution for a young woman's "aimlessness". Once married, her attention should turn inward toward her family and her home.

Stressing the importance of a woman in the home became key to preserving a cultural balance eminently favorable to men. The mass market media rapidly developed as a key player in this endeavor. Mass-media publications aimed at a female audience acted as a crucial, stabilizing factor that encouraged such domestic balance. In the December 1890 issue of the American women's magazine, *The Ladies' Home Journal*, home life is touted as the greatest honor for women.¹⁶

The roots of all pure love, of piety and honor, must spring from this *home*. First, above all other honors, in woman's ambition, should be to found such a shelter, where she may reign as its queen. No honor can be higher than to know she has built such a home; no dignity greater than to know she can be recognized as its honored, undisputed mistress. To preside with such skill that husband and children will rise up and call her blessed, is more noble than to rule an empire. "*Women's rights!*" Has man any that surpass this?¹⁷

The Biblical language used here ("[her] husband and children will rise up and call her blessed") refers to the Biblical Proverbs 31, a chapter in which an industrious wife achieves glory by performing daily household tasks in addition to raising her children. Her honor is her devotion to her family, and their reciprocal approval in her work. The language here adds a new, highly significant dimension to the text. A woman's role in the home is supported by ancient and compelling Biblical precepts, not only modern, reinforced, patriarchal cultural mores.

¹⁶ The significance of the name "Ladies' Home Journal" should not be ignored. Even with its title, this publication defined its target, and further emphasized a woman's place in domesticity.

¹⁷ Mrs. Henry Ward Beecher, "What is a True Home?" in *The Ladies' Home Journal* 8, no. 1 (Dec. 1890): 8, accessed August 13, 2015, HathiTrust.

However, this mood did not last long. It appears that a massive shift occurred shortly after the publication of the previous article. Just six months later, the same magazine reveals that in the last two decades, American women have joined the labor force, where “women’s usefulness and adaptability in the business and industrial world has immeasurably widened.”¹⁸ The advent of female labor faced vigorous skepticism, apprehension, and occasionally aggression. As historian Katherine Anthony asserted,

With the trend of women to the factories, the woman question was born. This concentration of production created a growing class of women whose income could be measured. The factory which enslaved them endowed them with a new independence in relation to the family. It struck at the roots of the patriarchal home.¹⁹

Women entering the workforce meant that two highly significant and related changes had occurred. First, women could now compete for wages with men. Second, women were leaving the home, the central guarantor of their femininity, and leaving it for morally ambiguous paid employment. The domestic sphere in Europe and the United States experienced a crisis on the brink of 1900 as women left in droves, pursuing personal freedoms outside of the home. Despite these obstacles, a few educated, enterprising, and determined women sought careers as artists.

Opportunities for aspiring female painters and sculptors remained extremely limited and repressive social views constrained such freedoms even more. In *fin-de-siècle* Europe, the Darwinian belief in women’s inherent idiocy suffused male debate and discussion. Darwin “reasoned that males [were] more evolutionarily advanced than females²⁰ and that “women’s

¹⁸ Charles J. Dumar, “Women’s Changes as Bread Winners: Women as Typesetters,” *The Ladies’ Home Journal* 8, no. 7 (June 1891): 4, accessed August 13, 2015, HathiTrust.

¹⁹ Katherine Anthony, *Feminism in Germany and Scandinavia* (New York, NY: Henry Holt and Company, 1915), 179.

²⁰ Bettyann Kevles, *Females of the Species: Sex and Survival in the Animal Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 8.

brains were analogous to those of animals.”²¹ The so-called “woman question” took up and rebutted this bias by aggressively querying exactly what women could and should do. Such interrogating only sharpened as women, especially in France, Italy, and Germany more vocally demanded labor rights in the tumultuous years before The First World War. These demands resulted in increased uncertainty regarding women’s social function.

Confusion about women’s role in society was ubiquitous. In terms of education and the fight for suffrage, the ‘woman question’ was becoming a public issue, but even while women were gaining ground, attitudes of dismayed skepticism flourished.²²

Rigid classification by gender norms acted as a way to control labor participants and inhibit women from joining traditionally male environments. In Germany, groups formed to fight against feminism and to preserve the German race from irrevocable emasculation and decline. According to some male rule makers, women were to blame for this devastation to manly German culture. In Weimar, Germany in 1912, a group of both men and women, led by Friedrich Sigismund, created the German League for the Prevention of Women’s Emancipation. Its aims were to prevent women from gaining political equality with men and to hinder women from gaining basic rights in order to maintain a strong state (equal rights for women meant an all-encompassing collapse of bourgeois morality or propriety).

Women working outside of the home evoked a cry of danger that converted the personal into the political sphere, private concerns into public issues, and domestic life into a civic responsibility. More than just alarmist or disingenuous reaction, public policy reflected deeply felt gender consciousness and an implacable anger toward erosion of cherished ideals. The themes of this resistance focused several interrelated fears: collapse of the family was imminent and inevitable; industrial work interfered with women’s reproductive function; moral perils of the factory compromised

²¹ Elizabeth Fee, “Nineteenth-Century Craniology: The Study of the Female Skull,” *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 53, no. 3 (Fall 1979), 418.

²² Shearer West, *Fin de Siecle: Art and Society in an Age of Uncertainty* (New York: The Overlook Press, 1994), 87.

modesty and purity; and women's work was a competitive threat to male labor, the implications of which were both substantive and symbolic.²³

The Prussian Conservative Party, attempting to preserve traditional women's roles, published a program in which the roles and "norms" for girls and women were outlined clearly. It stated the "norm is that girls marry and acquire their education through their marriage, but nonetheless something can also be made of sisters, daughters, nurses through brothers, fathers, the sick and the aged if they served these men with a warm heart."²⁴ Persistently subordinated to service of the patriarchs by male ideologues, women and their basic rights and privileges suffered even further restrictions in male-dominated artistic communities hardly welcoming to female interlopers.

The true problem arose when a woman rejected matrimony, committing her life instead to her artistic career. Male critics saw this sort of deviant behavior as a catalyst for all negative change in German culture. Female artistry undermined the values that had sustained society for centuries.

The growing visibility of women in Weimar in fact helps explain the defensive reaction toward women in the discourses of artists and intellectuals: their attempt to distance and thereby master the threat perceived as too close, too present, too overwhelming.²⁵

Indeed, the threat paralyzed some insecure men, and they searched endlessly for methods to prevent women's infiltration into the art patriarchy. Karl Scheffler, a widely influential figure in German art criticism, argued,

If she forces herself to be artistically creative, then she immediately becomes mannish. That is to say: she cripples her sex, sacrifices her harmony and with that surrenders out of hand every possibility of being original. Because true

²³ Barbara Franzoi, *At the Very Least, She Pays the Rent: Women and German Industrialization, 1871-1914* (London: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1985), 60.

²⁴ Paul de Lagarde, "Program of the Conservative Party of Prussia", 1887, quoted in Reinhold Heller, *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 46.

²⁵ Patrice Petro, *Joyless Streets: Women and Melodramatic Representation in Weimar Germany* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 69.

originality can only be found there where inner necessity reigns... Therefore, since woman cannot be original, she can only attach herself to men's art. She is the imitatrix par excellence, the empathizer who sentimentalizes and disguises manly art forms. In Goethe's words, she "is not capable of a single idea" and she "takes the knowledge and experience of man as ready-made and adorns herself with it." She is the born dilettante.²⁶

In addition to inferring a lack of serious commitment, the word "dilettante" implies that a woman could only imitate male genius. Scheffler maintained that when a woman discarded proper submissive femininity and then traded it for an attempt at independent creativity, she morphed into the despicable "third sex", unpleasant and bitter. This type of anti-woman complaint seeped through German high culture, countered the meager progress of women's professional rights, and created a hostile environment that aimed at reducing freedoms and restricting life for women. The liberal Weimar generation endorsed this restrictive view of women as well. Even German art schools, with a few exceptions, were closed to women students until after the First World War.²⁷ These institutions intended art to be a woman's hobby, not a lifelong career path. Many men, especially husbands, believed that artistic pursuits provided a positive, temporary distraction to keep a woman out of worse trouble. In order to preserve the boundaries that surrounded women, and their biologically-defined social role, Karl Scheffler later cautioned women that the penalties inflicted on those women seeking art professionally were, "atrophy, sickness or hypertrophy of sexual feelings, perversion or impotence."²⁸ Brutally, Scheffler warned women that the punishment for professional artistic pursuits would lead not only to social pressure and rejection, but also to crippling physical maladies, especially impotence, that would render a woman somehow defective. A powerful female presence in male-dominated professions, including the arts, terrified many German men. These men sought to prevent

²⁶ Karl Scheffler, *Die Frau und die Kunst* (Berlin, 1908), quoted in Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 46.

²⁷ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 40.

²⁸ Karl Scheffler, *Die Frau und die Kunst*, quoted in Ibid., 44.

women from infiltrating the barriers that separated women's work from hegemonic, male employment opportunities. Women became feared as threats to a stable, patriarchal society. Some male artists and fellow conservative social critics viewed women as unworthy heirs to centuries of German culture, made preponderantly by men. However, some German women artists vigorously demanded equality of expressive opportunity.

This call for gender equality in the arts roared up from the pages of mass media publications aimed at women. In the United States, female artists delivered speeches and published articles that focused on the difficulties of living within the confines of socially-imposed gender stipulations, while simultaneously adhering to the norms established by culture. This issue had long fueled women's debates in private, but now they advertised their contrary opinions publicly. Women artists wanted their work to be judged aesthetically, not by the sex of the creator. The *Woman's Journal* of 1896 featured an article that addressed this deep need for gender equality in art:

Art is art, and should speak for itself, and the pictures themselves should be placed in competition, not the sex of the painter. Sex in art is a fact, and it should be written against by all journals that wish to encourage true art.²⁹

However, some enterprising German women did achieve the seemingly impossible and escaped the confines of the home, earned an income, and participated in leisure activities. These emancipated, highly-controversial women were called "New Women". The New Woman became a role model, assertive of her own independence and determined to make her own art. Some modern German writers celebrated, endorsed, and encouraged the development of the New Woman. They denied the restrictions of domesticity in favor of financial and relational autonomy. She emerged during a radical change that swept through Germany between the wars. In the Weimar era, the New Woman blossomed into the icon

²⁹ Laura R. Prieto, *At Home in the Studio: The Professionalization of Women Artists in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 147.

of women's liberation, a symbol of the metropolitan empire and its great, liberating cities. The American Flapper became the New Woman's counterpart. Both examples were the epitome of the modern woman, participating in a host of activities, including sports, like bicycle riding, independent material enterprises (especially millenary and couture), and the arts. German culture simultaneously feared and loved the New Woman. She became a legitimate consumer of craft goods and artful merchandise. New fashions burst from stores across the world, with the claim that clothing alone could make one younger, sleeker, fitter, and more boyish. The promise of eternal youth and glamour promoted this movement's endurance. Older generations refuted the movement, forbidding young daughters to participate in such risqué pursuits. The young sought youth forever, and the New Woman, independent and carefree, carried such a promise.

However, in just a few short years, after the establishment of the Third Reich, the New Woman unceremoniously lost her status. Male, right-wing, political fanatics harshly criticized such improper female attitudes and behavior. A remarkable documentation of the woman's movement in twentieth-century Germany, *When Biology Became Destiny* (1984), traces the outcomes of these brave "New Women":

...the development of the "new woman" represented a phenomenon both broader and more complex than the images of the flapper or the sexy saleslady convey. The "new woman" – who voted, used contraception, obtained illegal abortions, and earned wages – was more than a bohemian minority or artistic convention. They existed in office and factory, bedroom and kitchen, just as surely as – and more significantly than – in café and cabaret... And it was this "new woman" who was to become a symbol of degeneracy and modern "asphalt culture" in Nazi propaganda.³⁰

Indeed, the New Woman posed an enormous threat to the formerly stable German society. If domestic life collapsed beneath the weight of labor needs and an unfamiliar,

³⁰ Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion Kaplan, eds., *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 11.

emancipated femininity, what would happen to the conventional, cornerstone familial traditionalism? If this historical social pillar disappeared, what would take its place? The New Woman could not be trusted to fill the void, as her conservative critics perceived her behavior, dress, and attitude as lewd, dangerous, and a constant threat to stable society.

It is essential to consider these negative perceptions of modern German femininity throughout my investigations of Gabriele Münter. While German feminism morphed into a powerful and charged movement, especially during the 1890s, it must not be overlooked that timeworn stereotypes of the domestic, maternal woman still shrank women's expressive opportunities. Traditional German culture maintained that by challenging these rigorous, biologically-defined stereotypes, a woman denounced her moral obligation to the home.

If any mere association with femininity became a devastating handicap, how could a female artist bent on establishing herself as a creative colossus succeed in her endeavors? If painting remained as a masculine enterprise, and to take up a brush ruined a woman's femininity, how could a woman survive in a prejudiced artistic community? Was marriage, as many emancipated women claimed, a disastrous pursuit that would result in a lifetime of monotony, and the necessary surrender of any girl's artistic, creative yearnings? Even in cities, where more personal freedoms existed, assertive, artful women had to circumvent and outsmart male barriers to their success. Gabriele Münter did so by seeking the most challenging artistic education available in women's academies, becoming easily bored with the curriculums offered at traditional schools. She found the academy "very uninspiring... besides, nobody there seemed to take seriously the artistic ambitions of a mere girl."³¹ She attended several artistic academies in Munich before landing at the Phalanx School in 1902,

³¹ Susan P. Bachrach, "A Comparison of the Early Landscapes of Münter and Kandinsky, 1902-1910," *Woman's Art Journal* 2, no. 1 (1981): 21-24, accessed August 15, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1357896>.

the most avant-garde art school in Germany. At the Phalanx School, Münter defied ambient constraints placed upon her sex and pursued a career in the arts without hesitation.

Gabriele Münter's Iconography of German Femininities

This chapter aims to elucidate the binary representations of modern, German femininities as represented in the artwork of Gabriele Münter from 1907-1917. Her pre-war depictions of women as enterprising, assertive, urbane characters in colorful environs became altered by her self-imposed exile and isolation in Scandinavia during the First World War. At this juncture, her visual constructions of modern womanhood highlighted women's wartime vulnerability, rather than their pre-war autonomy. During this decade-long period, Münter's depictions of women shift from portrayals of bold, self-confident individuals surrounded by vibrant color to portraits of passive, isolated women sequestered in domestic environments.

A great deal of her artistic output during these years concentrated on illuminating the hidden, private lives of lone women. She began these visual investigations in photographs of her American relatives during a two-year stay in the United States. Without academic instruction or external influence, Münter took a series of photographs that revealed the domestic lifestyle, attire, and behavior of women in rural, nineteenth-century America. This chapter will analyze the vital importance of these images, and the development of Münter's visual language that defines, describes, and illuminates the boundaries surrounding womanhood.

When defining Münter's artistic development, her upbringing and familial connections to the United States can be seen as unusual, yet crucial. According to Münter's recollections, Carl Friedrich Münter (Gabriele Münter's father) emigrated to the United States in 1847 to "avoid arrest and scandal due to his liberal ideals and revolutionary advocacy of personal freedom."³² Germany faced severe internal conflict in the 1840s. Carl

³² Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 9.

Münter was one of many Germans who fled his homeland to avoid persecution for his radical opinions. One year after Carl Münter arrived in the United States, the German Revolution of 1848 sparked a vigorous wave of nationalist thought and opinion throughout the German states. Rampant bloodshed and aggressive political persecution ravaged the country. German liberal activists like Carl Münter risked serious physical harm from conservative political activists. Just one year after Carl Münter arrived on American shores, thousands of German immigrants, later known as “The 48ers”, set off for the United States. These immigrants earned the moniker after being a part of radical domestic protests and then formed one of the highest surges of leftist immigrants into the United States in any one year.

Initially, Münter ran a general store, and later obtained a degree in dentistry from the Dental College in Cincinnati, Ohio. After the death of his first wife, Mary Lucinde Richardson, a native of Cincinnati, Münter returned to Germany briefly to visit his family. He then returned to Tennessee where he met his second wife, and Gabriele’s mother, Wilhelmine Scheuber, who had emigrated from the United States with her family in 1845. The pair would likely have remained in the United States had it not been for the American Civil War. Wilhelmine, pregnant with the couple’s first child, decided that the war posed too great a threat to the family’s safety. After much consideration, the Münters returned to Germany, where they began their family. Carl Münter re-established his successful dental business.

Münter’s father had become a well-regarded “American dentist” in Berlin by the time Gabriele was born. He had received thorough training in the United States, and American-trained specialists were considered the elite among dental institutions in Germany.

Carl Münter's profession gave Gabriele a significant advantage in social pursuits. Her father's upper middle-class title and salary financially equipped the family to provide elite schooling for the children. Carl Münter's professional stature and income also afforded the family a notable spot in the urban social environment. This social standing established a unique and beneficial situation for Gabriele Münter. Her father's financial contributions allowed her to maintain public legitimacy. The lifestyle afforded by Carl Münter, a highly-respected, upwardly mobile dental expert, provided cynics with a reasonable explanation of the family's decision to allow a gifted daughter to pursue art. In keeping with social standards of the period, people expected the Münter family to eventually pressure their "artistic" daughter into marriage. Until then, she enjoyed the freedoms of aesthetic pursuits.

However, the Münter family defied these rigid standards. Despite the increasing masculine monopoly of the arts, and the resulting ridicule toward female artists, Gabriele Münter's family continually supported her desire to become an artist. The family felt that it would give her life a sense of direction and increase her self-confidence. Münter's parents did not expect her to marry after she had explored the potential of an artistic career, an unprecedented decision made collectively by the Münter family.

Reinhold Heller, author of *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism*, illustrates clearly Münter's unique, advantageous artistic development profoundly influenced by the family's American ties.

What is surprising about Gabriele Münter's childhood, and her artistic activity during that period, is that it was absolutely ordinary. She grew up in the comfort and protection of a well-to-do, German middle-class home during the era of peace and relative prosperity that characterized the first decades of the German Empire. What distinguished the Münter home from others, if anything, was its close ties to the United States: Münter's parents had lived and married there, close relatives – including one son, whom her mother visited at least once during Münter's childhood – continued to live there and American words, sayings, songs and objects were sprinkled among the German ones in the home. Also attributable to the American influence

was a lack of rigidity and a greater sense of freedom than was common in the German middle class... The Münter daughters were allowed unusual freedom, as when they were given bicycles, were allowed to smoke and to read controversial avant-garde literature or were not forced into early marriages.³³

This consistent and early exposure to more emancipated American women's culture undoubtedly became a key influence in Münter's later life. She continued her love of bicycling as photographs of her riding through the countryside with artist Wassily Kandinsky have revealed. Photographs also indicate that she smoked occasionally. She never married, nor did she have children. She deviated from traditional women's roles with encouragement from her family members. Despite this, she feared that her family misunderstood her artistic endeavors. Heller writes, "Her early works also serve to demonstrate a degree of social alienation resulting from the confines of a bourgeois family and its values, another requisite of the modernist paradigm."³⁴

Despite her family's support, Münter recalled hiding drawings from her family, fearing that they would not understand her need for a creative outlet, or worrying that she may be subjected to parental criticisms for making "mistakes". However, on her tenth birthday, Münter received a high-quality set of watercolors, surely another early indication of her family's wish to support her drawing and painting efforts.

Prior to her mother's untimely death in 1897, Münter enrolled in the Lyceum for Girls in Koblenz, Germany in order to further her artistic education. Here she learned via drafting sketches of heads and botanical illustrations of flowers and leaves. Later, in 1896, Münter attended private art lessons from a member of the Herford art organization "Malkiste" (meaning "art box"). This early foundation in the artistic community inspired Münter to pursue new creative paths.

³³ Ibid., 40.

³⁴ Ibid., 102.

Münter successfully navigated across cultural boundaries utilizing personalized social maps. As I discussed previously, a social map is a codified, internal collection of information regarding proper public and private behavior, appropriate language, and respectable attire. With a thorough understanding of these cultural components and utilizing her personal social maps, Münter learned how to circumvent these standards. She never married Kandinsky, nor did she wed her later partner, Johannes Eichner. She never bore children, nor focused her attentions on keeping a home. These behaviors illustrate Münter's careful considerations of her social maps, as she knew that marriage, children, and domesticity were the pathways to "proper" womanhood. She knew precisely how to sidestep these pressures successfully and pursue her own course.

Münter cultivated this ability throughout her life as an artist. Not only did she utilize these social maps to carry out business in Germany, she also employed them to inform her travels in foreign countries. As mentioned previously, American words, objects, and phrases were prevalent amid the trappings of German life in the Münter home. She travelled widely, making several formative trips to France, Italy, and northern Africa. I believe this cultural plurality gives Münter a unique advantage in her artwork. References to her American connection may be seen in her painting *Still Life, Red* from 1909, (fig. 1) which features two vibrant bowls of magnificently ripe fruit, a vase of freshly-cut zinnia blooms, and an American flag draped across the vivaciously red table.

Within the still-life vocabulary, the American flag, likewise, would have stood out as incongruous in the German or French settings where Münter displayed her work. This note of incongruity, of being out of place, is removed only once one knows of Münter's personal links with the United States and recognizes the flag as a souvenir of her earlier lengthy trip there. Then the still life's disruptive juxtapositions become resolved in recognition of Münter's milieu, her interests and her past. But this is privileged information, so to speak, which we today share, but which the exhibition visitors who were Münter's contemporaries and whom her art addressed did not know. To them, the flag was necessarily an odd intrusion, its presence

inexplicable except perhaps as an exotic reference to the world of Teddy Roosevelt or of Karl May's popular adventure novels of Indian life, resonating with European conceptions of only a half-civilized America, and reasserting the "wildness" of Münter's Expressionist style.³⁵

While subtle, Münter continues to refer to her American ties visually throughout her career. Her contemporaries may not have recognized these affiliations, but it is compelling that she included them as homage to her past and her family, as well as to her journey to the United States. Her paintings map and remap her travels. These travels began with her long trek to America.

After the death of her parents, Münter received a substantial inheritance that allowed her to travel to the United States to visit American relatives. She made this voyage of personal discovery in 1898 with her sister, Emmy Münter. This journey not only exposed her to a foreign culture, but also allowed her to learn how to investigate and interpret striking socio-cultural differences in visual art.

The journey began with an invitation from her relatives to come and visit them after Münter had been orphaned. Together with her sister, Münter left from Rotterdam on the S.S. Statendam on September 29th, 1898. They arrived in New York on October 9th, and departed by train for St. Louis eleven days later. During their stay, they visited their mother's sister in St. Louis, went to Niagara Falls and Buffalo, stayed with a second aunt in Arkansas, and finally landed in Texas, where they visited their widowed cousin. While the sisters visited their aunt Caroline Schreiber in Moorefield, Arkansas, Münter received a state-of-the-art Kodak camera for her twenty-second birthday.

This camera became an extraordinary instrument of Münter's early artistic pursuits. With this camera, she began experimenting with aesthetic creativity, developing beautifully balanced and well-composed images of her American family members. Her photographs

³⁵ Ibid., 106.

were quite distinctive because they portrayed elements of daily life in the United States while maintaining a balanced, well-orchestrated figural composition. These photographs clearly prefigure Münter's later works as evidenced by similar compositional structures in her paintings from the early 1900s onward. By studying Münter's ample photographs from her journey to the United States, it is apparent that she developed a keen sense of aesthetic composition from behind the lens. These artistic skills translate to her drawings, paintings, etches, and *Hinterglasmalerei* (paintings behind glass) completed in her later life.

These early photographs provide us with ample evidence that Münter possessed an inherent talent for arranging masterly compositions, an evident feat in her paintings and drawings as well. She seems to understand thoroughly the proper use of line, shadow, and organic shapes. She knows intuitively their roles in an orderly photograph or painting. She deftly balances positive and negative space, while imparting an air of spontaneity, a characteristic that defines both her photography and later work as a painter. Most importantly, these early American photographs are indicative of her *plein air* preferences, unstructured masterpieces created outdoors in a serendipitous but still deliberate, well-composed manner.

Perhaps one of the most thrilling examples of Münter's remarkable ability to create expertly crafted photographs is her 1899/1900 piece, "A merry crowd eating dinner on the ground" (fig. 2).³⁶ In this photograph, three young men and three young women sit in a group, arranged in a semicircle around a quilt spread out across the grassy forest floor. Both the ladies and the gentlemen display sophisticated fashion. The men have donned full suits and the women wear high-necked dresses. The picnickers appear relaxed and effortlessly pose for the photograph. Intriguingly, this photograph's composition resembles Claude

³⁶ Helmut Friedel, ed., *Gabriele Münter: Die Reise nach Amerika, Photographien 1899-1900* (Munich: Schirmer-Mosel, 2006), 128.

Monet's sumptuous 1865-1866 painting *Luncheon on the Grass* (fig. 3). In fact, I believe the similarities are so distinct that Münter may have referred to a mental image of the painting when constructing the photograph.

Vital to my thesis research are Münter's spectacular photographs capturing single women, staring broodingly into the lens. These types of compositions are especially distinctive in her later work. The lone female figure is not unique to art history, but Münter's representations of this canonical image liberate femininity from the spheres of masculine sociability, pushing viewers toward realms of feminine autonomy and independent existence.

An example of Münter's careful consideration of her lone female subjects is "Mädchen im weißen Kleid auf einer Veranda" from 1899/1900 taken in Marshall, Texas (fig. 4).³⁷ In this photograph, a young woman in a frilly white dress poses elegantly on her front porch. One arm hangs gracefully down her side, while the other bends to swish the fabric of her dress. She has slightly raised her daintily shod foot from the ground, as if to mimic the movements of a ballerina. Her head tilts downward with poised concentration. The Degas-esque composition resembles greatly the French Impressionist's iconic images of ballerinas, gracefully swirling across the stage in a whirl of fabric and color. Münter's lively and knowing response to early and mature aesthetics of Impressionism, especially those French images privileging women and women's freedoms, indicates that she sought consistently to emulate prominent, radical advancements made in European artistic circles.

I do not wish to discount Münter's artistic genius by suggesting that she copied a man's work, but I must stress her apparent exposure and visual homages to great works of contemporary art. It is known that Münter had already received some intensive artistic

³⁷ Ibid., 85.

training as a young woman, from 1890 to 1897. This is most likely when she would have encountered works by Monet, Degas, and other Impressionists.

Münter's journey to the United States undoubtedly played a crucial role in the development of her talents for visual narration. More importantly, the experience taught her to create art without adhering to rigorous academic curricula. Münter operated beyond the confines of professional instruction. This early independent experimentation remained as the single most vital event in Münter's artistic development.

In the transformation of Gabriele Münter from artistic dilettante to professional artist, the American experience was fundamental. With the exception of one trip taken to the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, where she was confronted by models of European architectural monuments as well as by the museum's incipient collection of works by distinguished European "masters," and where standard European values were thus enshrined and reconfirmed, she encountered little that would commonly be recognized as art during her visits to Missouri, Arkansas, and Texas... Drawing in an artistic void, without guidance or reinforcing models, Münter was forced to depend solely on her own artistic memory, her own previously taught and continuously developing skills, and her own judgment. The only means she could employ were the ones she herself supplied. Fostered by her isolation were unprecedented self-reliance and independence of spirit.³⁸

The years that she spent with her American relatives were largely devoid of art. To fill this void, she experimented by sketching the "novel, mixed milieu" that she discovered in the homes of American businessmen and cowboys.³⁹ Her drawings and photographs reveal an early and comprehensive understanding of aesthetic composition, and also uncover a wild, rural America, not yet harnessed to industrialization. Perhaps Münter also learned the value of rural living during her two-year journey in the United States. Her nurturing and carefully built and decorated home in Murnau, Germany, possesses many of the same qualities found in the homes she visited in America, suggesting her affinity for these rural,

³⁸ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 43.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

domestic spaces. Driven by her self-reliance, Münter did not fear being alone in these environments. In this way, Münter may be perceived as anomalous. Many women artists did not possess this deep-rooted independence, or had limited opportunities to exercise it. Instead they utilized their connections to their families or powerful husbands to gain social acceptance. Münter's early, independent creative experimentation marks the beginning of her professionalization as a female artist. In this study, professionalization is defined as the process of transforming a hobby, trade, or occupation into a virtuous paid profession. For some women, social acknowledgment of their competency or expertise and approval of their achievement accompanied this transformation.

Twentieth-century professionalization of female artists indicates a greater shift in labor. Modern professionalization is characterized by a woman's credibility in creative circles, as well as her income earned by her artistic output. A woman must be publicly acknowledged and accepted as an artist. This proved to be an immensely difficult obstacle to overcome. In studios, women could establish a tiny refuge of female artistic culture. Sex lost its influence as an isolating characteristic, becoming a defining element in a woman's more autonomous artistic development and success.

In the early twentieth century, German art academies faced increased pressure to open their doors to female entrants. Most academies still operated under highly oppressive campaign "*Schülerinnen finden keine Aufnahme*" ("female students will find no admission").⁴⁰ In Berlin, women were barred from attending government-operated fine arts schools. Women attended applied and decorative art schools, but prestigious academies restricted a woman's access. The Prussian Academy's guidelines reflect the attitude about women creating authentic, serious artwork:

⁴⁰ Ibid., 10.

Membership... falls into two categories: “regular” and “honorary”. Only practicing artists are eligible to be regular members; honorary membership is for persons who, without being artists, have brought merit to the academy or to art in general, as well as for outstanding women artists.⁴¹

Despite these oppressive guidelines, women gained credibility as spectators of cultural changes and shifting norms. They watched, understood, and recreated visually their surroundings. Women could decipher, interpret, and reconstruct inner emotions, personal experiences, and display them publicly in art. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, women could become *flâneuses*, or attentive, urban female spectators. New Women harnessed and perfected the ability to make insightful, perceptive reflections based upon their numerous nomadic observations throughout German metropolitan areas. The New Woman artist and *flâneuse* became a sensationally scandalous character because she could make these sorts of observations independent of a man’s influence and outside of her sphere of domesticity. She operated on her own terms, and recreated what she saw. In this way, these New Women artists may not be considered dilettantes, or mere imitators of their surroundings. Women learned to decipher thoroughly and accurately the scenes of authentic urban and domestic life. Through artwork, which frequently exposed the cloistered, invisible worlds of domestic women, New Women defined themselves as social commentators.

Further to increase their visibility in the creative arts, women in Germany and in the United States now began to exhibit their artwork alongside their male cohorts. These exhibitions helped them publicly legitimize themselves as active and valued members of an expanding creative sphere of visual expression and critique in contemporary society.

Gender shaped the process of professionalization in disparate ways. Occupations ran the risk of feminization, which might mean that women

⁴¹ *Chronik der Königl. Akademie der Künste zu Berlin*, 1901-02, 5, quoted in Diane J. Radycki, “The Life of Lady Art Students: Changing Art Education at the Turn of the Century,” *Art Journal* 42, no. 1 (1982): 11, accessed October 14, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/776485>.

dominated the profession numerically or that the type of work evoked feminine associations in the popular imagination – or both.⁴²

Some women gained easier access to these places by choosing subject matter deemed appropriate by men. Women who sought to convey domestic spaces and familial relationships were primarily more successful at achieving a modicum of support from the patriarchal art world. Men believed that these spaces and interactions seemed too intimate and soft for their own work, preferring to illustrate triumphant, historical battles or mythological scenes. It is ironic that domesticity, the very space that trapped a woman inside, also provided her a place on the walls of museums and exhibition halls in the modernizing United States and Germany.

Instead of instantly being relegated to a lower status because of their sex, German women who gained admittance into the artistic community began to play a dual role in artistic creation: passive and active, marginal and central. The National Association of Women Artists in the United States and *Der Blaue Reiter* in Germany became key elements to helping women establish themselves as vital players in society. These types of open, tolerant, and coed organizations promoted women artists as an organized, cohesive unit. These varieties of unification increased the sense of professionalism among women, both personally and publicly.

Gabriele Münter's previous schooling at the Ladies' Academy in Munich played a tremendous role in her professional artistic development. The experience gave her confidence in her work.

[These types of academies] fostered an attitude of support, seriousness of purpose and a community such as few private studios provided for their students. Side by side with other women, here, Münter ceased to denigrate

⁴² Prieto, *At Home in the Studio*, 7.

her own work as dilettantish, but rather identified it as clearly professional in intention.⁴³

Within the confines of the academy, Münter learned to express her individuality as a woman and as an artist. The dual function of the woman/artist demonstrates a progressive ideology that permeated German and American art academies. Women could become professional participants in an artistic world that surrendered its highly patriarchal nature for a more male and female membership of visual workers. In academic settings, women gained agency as legitimate producers of art.

Münter's personal validation and acknowledgement of the quality of her output characterizes the final stage of women's artistic professionalization. Personal validation meant that a woman artist became fully aware and in control of her creative competency, and developed confidence in her output. While women artists may have been publicly seen as professionals, accepting their personal credibility as competent, well-regarded artists became the most crucial rite of passage in the formative process. However, this profoundly difficult process required vigorous self-introspection. The immense personal importance of this belief must not be ignored. As I previously discussed, women artists were once dismissed as congenitally insignificant, unoriginal imitators of male genius. They lacked the inherent ability and creative will to become true artists. Realizing their own true worth became a vital step in their artistic advancement and professionalization. Münter took this step shortly after returning to Germany in 1900.

After her sojourn in the United States, Münter returned to European soil with the goal of becoming a professional artist. Like many artists, Münter settled in the creative community of Schwabing, a raucous, bohemian neighborhood in Munich, home to an eccentric and innovative citizenry drawn from all social ranks and numerous foreign cultures.

⁴³ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 50.

Among the legions of creative talents here were the German Expressionist painter Franz Marc, the Russian émigré Expressionist Wassily Kandinsky, as well as the irreverent satirical writer Fanny von Reventlow.

It seems that conventional German views of feminine ideals got roundly attacked in Schwabing. Von Reventlow's writings remain to prove this. In her hilarious and confrontational literary masterpiece, *Herrn Dames Aufzeichnungen* (Mr. Dame's Notebooks), von Reventlow paints a portrait of a hapless but heroic protagonist, Herr Dame, "Mister Lady", who constantly frets over his feminine surname. He lives beneath the weight of a crippling fear that no woman would ever desire to be his wife, for then she would be condemned to assume the name "Frau Dame", or "Lady Lady". Because of his name, he thinks himself a social and gender pariah. He is banished merely to observe the evolution of cultures as a kind of wallflower. Bitter and devastated by his misfortune, Herr Dame speaks ill of social gatherings, artistic murmurings and other bantering.⁴⁴

While von Reventlow crafted this work to be a humorous tale of an unlucky gentleman, it does not take much effort to read between the lines and decipher *Herr Dame* as a biting social commentary on the hostile attitudes toward women that threaten the advance of liberated German femininities sought by Münter. I assume that, by any other name, Herr Dame would be welcomed into society as an active member in the expansion of the worlds the poor misnamed protagonist now so heatedly spurns. Instead, he is branded as an outcast, merely as a result of his name. The odd juxtaposition between his title and his gender blemishes his identity as a man. He is dismissed before he can voice an opinion. He is rejected and shoved to the outer reaches of society for, as he accurately perceives, being too "lady-like". His affiliation with femininity simply by his name reveals a greater

⁴⁴ Phillip Blom, *The Vertigo Years* (Philadelphia: Basic Books, 2008), 198-199.

interpretation of womanhood. Von Reventlow asserts through this satirical story that femininity is a socially constructed and imposed identity, rather than any real characteristic of a person. Herr Dame's masculinity is blighted by his name, which serves as his primary method of biological identification. Femininity, for him, is both an undesirable identity and a disease.

Unsurprisingly, Fanny von Reventlow possessed aggressively opinionated views of marriage, which she considered to be synonymous with female prostitution. As discussed in 'What is Proper for Women' (1899), von Reventlow states:

As a small girl, she is expected to go nicely to school and for well-behaved walks with parents or governess; then as a big girl according to situation, she must function as a useful or decorative object in the house. Once engaged she should be a bride-to-be, blushing demurely while sewing her trousseau. As a wife, she should stand at the side of her husband caring for him and loving him, meeting the duties of the Christian marriage bed as best she can and bringing up her children for the same wretched lifelong boredom.⁴⁵

Recalling Karl Scheffler's previous admonition to artistic women, one may see that dueling concepts of femininity likely caused tensions in professionalizing women struggling to find their places in a patriarchal society. To Fanny von Reventlow, a woman with a long string of cherished lovers, settling down into marital bliss represented a deeply unfortunate and tragic existence. She clearly believed a woman should be free to express herself sexually and creatively outside of the confines of the patriarchal home. According to Scheffler, a woman who attempted to break the barriers between art and gender ruined herself, remaining in society as a mere shadow of her former, purer female self. She morphed into the unwanted "Other", an intensely undesirable creature alien to the realms of proper domestic femininity.

⁴⁵ Franziska von Reventlow, "What is Proper for Women?" (Zurich: Verlag der Zürcher Diskußionen, 1899), 1-8, quoted in Chris Weedon, *Gender, Feminism, and Fiction in Germany 1840-1914* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2006), 75.

In spite of these warnings to prevent women's pursuit of formal artistic training, Münter enrolled at the Munich Ladies Academy, where she studied portraiture. After one year, Münter ambitiously sought greater challenges, and she withdrew from the academy. Next, she enrolled in sculptor Wilhelm Hüsgen's classes at the Phalanx School in 1902.⁴⁶ The Phalanx School devoted itself to teaching its students, both male and female, modern principles of art. The Chairman of the Phalanx School, Russian artist Wassily Kandinsky, acted as Münter's supervisor and mentor. Kandinsky originally chastised Münter as being a hopeless student who was simply impossible to teach. He reasoned that her innate talent prevented her from gaining anything substantial in the classroom. He claimed his only contribution to her artistic education would be to hone, perfect, and polish her talent.

Shortly after meeting Kandinsky, the two began exchanging brief, platonic letters. However, Münter's fondness for her mentor grew exponentially between 1902-1903. Münter admitted in later recollections that she gained precious insights about art and life from him. Her connection to Kandinsky did her many favors in her journey to become a thriving female artist, as male artists still frequently acted as legitimizers of feminine artistic production. As the two artists became fonder of each other, Münter faced an awkward predicament. At this stage, Kandinsky had not yet separated from his first wife. Münter suffered devastating guilt for her affections toward a married man. She reprimanded herself in an un-mailed letter in 1902 claiming that she was a "chump" to believe the connection between herself and Kandinsky was one of love, not lust or infatuation. Bourgeois German culture considered a single woman pining for a married man as highly immoral. However, Kandinsky's early letters provided Münter with shreds of hope, encouraging her to be

⁴⁶ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 12.

patient and wait for him as he sorted out his feelings. In October of 1902, Kandinsky wrote to Münter:

...I love you very much and again and a hundred times as much. You have to believe it and you mustn't forget it. And then in public and for ourselves we are friends. And then time comes and shows us where we were right and where we were wrong. And we have more trust in each other! Yes? Not always asking oneself: is this Love? Why should I lie? I too have lost my peace of mind, my equanimity. I would so much like to see you for just a half hour! But one must also have a tiny bit of character! And I want to have it. Even though it hurts...⁴⁷

His words had a profound effect on Münter. Only one year later, they began the long, strained, and painful relationship as housemates, lovers, and fellow artists after Kandinsky promised to divorce his first wife. While living in Murnau, a small town in rural Bavaria, Münter received harsh criticism for never marrying the man with whom she lived openly.⁴⁸ Outside of marriage, Germans considered it socially unacceptable for a woman to reside with her male counterpart, especially for a “respectable” middle-class woman. Münter likely felt herself standing on a narrow ridge between the desire for marital happiness and the hope of becoming a professional artist. As I pointed out previously, these dueling femininities had trouble residing together.

A married woman who has no other vocation constitutes the most difficult problem of the woman movement. She stands between “two worlds, the one dead, the other powerless to be born.” ... The economic independence of the unmarried woman is constantly hampered and impeded by the economic dependence of the married woman.⁴⁹

It appears that Münter faced this precise and difficult obstacle. To be married meant emotional and likely financial security, though her ability to become an artist may have been

⁴⁷ Annegret Hoberg, trans., *Wassily Kandinsky and Gabriele Münter: Letters and Reminiscences 1902-1914* (London: Prestel Publishing, 2005), 54.

⁴⁸ Gabriele Münter's home, often called *das Russenhaus*, or “the Russian's House”, became known as *das Hurenhaus*, or “the Whore House” because many of the couple's Murnau neighbors believed it was immoral and disgraceful for her to live with a man without being married to him. Stephanie Schröder, *Gabriele Münter: Im Bann des Blauen Reiters* (Freiburg im Briesgau: Verlag Herder GmbH, 2014).

⁴⁹ Anthony, *Feminism in Germany and Scandinavia*, 201.

culturally throttled in this case. To be unmarried meant insecurity, constantly shunted to the rear of the economic queue, but she could pursue her ambition as an artist, though with difficulty.

Perhaps in an effort to gain clarity about her complicated situation, Münter sought out the literature of feminist philosopher Theodor Lessing, specifically his 1910 work *Weib, Frau, Dame* (Female, Woman, Lady).

Wanted to read in the afternoon – the philosophy of the feminist Lessing – a new book *Weib, Frau, Dame* but the phonograph was going across the street ... – so I did some ironing – I always have my things quite tidy.⁵⁰

Lessing, who studied in Munich until his departure to Hannover in 1907, investigated the etymological basis for the words applied to women. Echoing the Nietzschean term, *der Übermensch*, Lessing suggested that alternative terminology should be chosen to better define and embrace characteristics of “female/nature, woman/economy, [and] lady/culture.”⁵¹

The concept of the *Überfrau*, the totally socialized and differentiated worker participating equally in the money economy, was considered to be crucial to women’s advancement in the modern world.⁵²

It is likely that Lessing’s philosophical texts intrigued Münter. Her depictions of lone, female figures confront historical ideologies of the woman as an object of masculine spectatorship. Münter’s pre-war portraiture contributes to the larger cultural phenomenon of women’s emancipation by representing individual women gazing assertively at the viewer. In 1908-1909, her artistic vocabulary shifts dramatically to accommodate her perceptions of confident, modern, urbane womanhood. Just as Lessing sought to redefine the terms applied to women, Münter desired to reevaluate the iconography of German femininity.

⁵⁰ Shulamith Behr, “Beyond the Muse: Gabriele Münter as *Expressionistin*,” in *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression 1906-1917* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005), 43-71.

⁵¹ Ibid., 64

⁵² Ibid., 63

Münter reimagined and revised traditional images of passive women in domestic spaces, vulnerable to male objectification. She granted her female figures authority over their viewers, rather than endorsing visually the idea of feminine submissiveness.

Despite Münter's progressive artistic output, her personal life remained conflicted. She desired nothing more than stability with Kandinsky, either as a loving companion or artful mentor. Without a proper marriage to her name, Münter's ability to explore women's culture in Munich suffered severely. Her unmarried relationship with Kandinsky reduced her freedoms even more.

Her attention focused on people and objects as they appeared to her, from within the confines of her personal milieu, defined and limited by her social background, her profession, her sex and her marital status. Her activity and contacts with the city of Munich were restricted according to the norms of propriety imposed on middle-class women; many of the spaces and events open to men were closed to her and other women unless they were escorted by a man. Because Kandinsky expressly disapproved, she no longer attended with any frequency the plays, operas, balls, and artists' festivals she had regularly enjoyed in her earlier life. Since her respectability and suitability for reception in people's homes was severely compromised by her "immoral" relationship with Kandinsky, she had virtually no social contacts, outside Munich's very small group of progressive artists and writers, their companions, and a few members of the Eastern émigré community. Her world had become extremely circumscribed.⁵³

Because of this situation, Münter's primary subject matter originates from the social interactions that conventional gender controls permitted her to have. This is the primary reason Münter's repertoire contains so many images of women, children, still lifes, and interiors. Additionally, Münter often found herself in the company of a few Munich-based artists with whom she developed deep friendships. These became the subjects that she gained permission to view on a regular basis. Thus, these scenes of modern, German life and its citizenry appear prominently in Münter's artwork. When Münter interacted with fellow, avant-garde artistic explorers, she could more freely express her femininity without

⁵³ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 83.

fear of judgment from society. How did these limiting, conventional structures affect Münter's perception of her own femininity? How might "femininities" be defined? How does Münter represent dualistic femininities in twentieth-century German cultures and subcultures?

To investigate these, I will analyze several of Münter's portraits completed between 1907 and 1917. Early portraits of lone women assert vibrant, confident femininity. Münter represents women in bold, audacious color, seated at the forefront of the canvas. Her wartime images, which depict isolated women in darkened domestic spaces, reveal melancholy, female attitudes concerning the disastrous conflict. Münter's perceptive recreations of these contrasting situations affirm that she comprehended the complex and alternating appearances and expressions of German femininities.

In 1909, Münter completed an iconic, bust-length portrait of fellow female artist Marianne von Werefkin (fig. 5). In *Portrait of Marianne von Werefkin*, Münter depicts the cosmopolitan woman artist looking over her right shoulder and smiling slightly at the viewer. She wears an elegant, rose-colored scarf draped around her neck and over her shoulder. Von Werefkin's broad, round sun hat, adorned with a large floral arrangement, sits askew, casting her face in florescent green shadow. Münter highlights von Werefkin's emerald complexion with dabs of vivid pink and blue. The luminous yellow wall behind von Werefkin is the painted base of Münter's Murnau home. The golden background is punctuated by glowing flecks of pink, orange, and green, which mirror the radiant hues of von Werefkin's face and clothing. It appears to be gilded, reminiscent of Gustav Klimt's resplendent and incandescent *Jugendstil* portraiture during his Golden Phase (1899-1910).

Münter simplifies von Werefkin's form and apparel by tracing each major contour in a thin line of dark paint. This technique reduces the figure's form to a series of colorful,

well-defined shapes. This simplification of forms marks Münter's complete departure from Impressionistic canvases in naturalistic color to impulsive, kaleidoscopic Fauvist visions of chromatically abstracted forms.

Portrait of Marianne von Werefkin translates visually Münter's personal, progressive interpretations of early twentieth-century German femininity. In an undated note, Münter described von Werefkin's portrait as "a bombastic appearance, self-confidently, authoritatively, [and] richly dressed."⁵⁴ Von Werefkin's confident expression confronts viewers with the spectacle of modern, audacious, artistic womanhood. She possesses absolute control of her viewers, her body, and most importantly, her circumstances.

During the pre-war years, Gabriele Münter's artistic output regularly featured images of woman in positions of control. In 1910, the artist completed her most celebrated group portrait entitled *Boating* (fig. 6). The sizable canvas allows for ample space to depict the sky and mountainous landscape of Murnau, a Bavarian village south of Munich. At the forefront of the painting, Münter positioned a four-person boating party aboard a tiny, cramped vessel, drifting perhaps fifty yards from shore. The characters, in clockwise order beginning at the standing, central figure of Wassily Kandinsky, are fellow painter Marianne von Werefkin, Gabriele Münter with both oars in her hands, and Andreas Jawlensky, the young son of painter Alexei Jawlensky. As the viewers, we share Münter's view of the group, and we are positioned as if we are standing opposite of Kandinsky, at eye level with him. We can only see Münter's bulky, round hat, painted a similar shade of blue as her skirt, the two chromatically bisected by her pristine white blouse. Von Werefkin and Jawlensky also wear large hats, though it appears to be overcast. Kandinsky stands magnificently at the bow of the little boat, turning back to face Münter, and the viewer. Kandinsky's position is

⁵⁴ Behr, "Beyond the Muse," 61.

rather precarious and would likely result in his plummet into the lake. Münter, disregarding the realistic outcome, has painted him to retain his pride, dry and dignified. Author and art historian Reinhold Heller states:

Thematically, the painting has its roots in such German Romantic themes as crossing lakes and seas – metaphors for life’s grand transitions – and wedding parties, but also urban dwellers entering the revelation of nature’s glories.⁵⁵

Kandinsky’s steady gaze nearly meets the viewer’s eyes on an equal plane, giving the painting a perhaps unintentionally confrontational energy, mirrored by the threatening storm clouds looming above the mountains in the background. The triangular patch of black forest on the painting’s right side seems to send ominous messages of impending danger, mimicking the unfriendly atmosphere overall. Young Jawlensky nervously tucks his hands between his legs, a sign of his discomfort or anxiety. The dog at Münter’s feet places his paws along the fluorescent rim of the boat, but no wagging tail is visible. The unblinking eyes of Münter’s motionless passengers stare fixedly at the viewer.

It is unlikely that Münter would have been able physically to row a boat containing four people and a dog. This is not to insult her physical strength, but to provide a realistic perspective. For Münter, a self-declared *plein air* painter, this sort of outdoor painting appealed to her, but the composition seems to have stemmed from her imagination, giving her ample room to enclose personal symbolisms within the image.

Analyzing the distinct composition of this painting is crucial to comprehending Münter’s symbolic representation of the two artists’ relationship. Münter has depicted herself directly beneath Kandinsky’s standing figure, fusing the two of them together inside an imaginary boundary directly down the center of the canvas. They are eternally fixed within the perimeter of the tiny boat. The canvas is bisected by Kandinsky’s towering figure

⁵⁵ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 126.

and the distant shoreline. However, it is unlikely that Kandinsky could have actually stood so precariously on the bow of the little rowboat without plunging into the lake. His prominent stature and position in relation to Münter's seated figure may symbolize the artists' reciprocal influences upon each other's stylistic development.⁵⁶ Münter powers the small boat, and Kandinsky can see and guide its course across the lake. She relies on his eyes and direction, while he relies on her power.

This image provides astute viewers with a remarkable visual commentary on demarcations, boundaries between conventional and avant-garde manifestations of womanhood, both seen and unseen, and the ways in which these boundaries may be broken if only via the artful human imagination. Münter's control of the boat confirms this. According to German tradition in this era, a man, like Kandinsky, should take the oars in hand to power the crowded boat back to shore. This would be considered chivalrous and proper. However, disinterested in convention, Münter, the woman and the artist, portrays herself as commander of the fragile craft. Facing an imminent storm, Münter becomes the captain.

In Münter's view, I think, womanhood has little or nothing to do with female sexuality. The evidence for this is Münter's continuous reluctance to render any woman's frame with emphasis placed on her breasts, torso, and hips. Femininity is not synonymous with sexuality, but with learning to take control and propulsively navigate her circumstances. Münter gives herself exceptional power as she rows the little boat across the lake. She does not expose her body to be examined, nor does she reveal von Werefkin's body. This may be a sign of respect and consideration for the plight of sexually-objectified women in early

⁵⁶ In 1910, Münter completed a second image with the same title (*Boating*), but eliminated Kandinsky's figure. This version may have been a preliminary sketch before she made the final product, as evidenced by the similar composition structure between the two paintings. If this was, in fact, an early rendition of the painting discussed above, then there can be no doubt that the addition of Kandinsky is highly symbolic.

twentieth-century Germany. Seldom had women possessed power in any situation outside of the home, or outside of sexuality, and it is important to consider this painting from these perspectives. Münter, as the painter and the rower, has the directional power in the scene. While she does not look at us, she views her subjects. *Her* eyes lead us to the rest of the painting. The three in her party stoically reflect the viewer's gaze, but it is her gaze that leads us to inspect the additional elements of the piece, including the ominous atmosphere and the distant shoreline. She allows her viewers a glimpse into the scene, but we see only as much as she wants us to see. In this case, femininity refutes the tradition of the woman as a passive spectator. Her active presence, active gaze, and steering actions demand acknowledgment and respect.

In this example, Münter created the perfect courtship between the woman as an intuitive, thoughtful element in a larger story, but also as the reasoning, logical, directional protagonist. She is quiet and intuitive, placidly gazing at her company, while simultaneously controlling her circumstances. Her intuition and logic allow her to assess her surroundings and know how best to manage the situation. She does not desire to be a man, nor does she assume masculine qualities. Twentieth-century German culture assumed that a woman's gender would beget feminine behavior. However, Münter and women like her, refused to be constrained by one-dimensional gender roles.

In my opinion, Münter defined visually her femininity only in part by her gender, but mostly from her uniquely perceptive and instigating actions, combining instinct and reason. This dichotomous relationship between these two facets of femininity illuminates a prominent theme in the artwork of Gabriele Münter. Her thoughtful representations of women demonstrate the multi-faceted existence of twentieth-century German women. Münter addresses sympathetically the challenges of the women who faced consistently over-

sexualizing of their bodies. She does so by painting these women in command of their bodies, their minds, and often their surroundings. As author Katherine Anthony states, “The program of feminism is not the mere imitation of masculine gestures and motions. The program of feminism is the development of a new science of womanhood.”⁵⁷ It is a socio-biological endeavor to redefine femininity by giving it observational advantages and self-directed authority.

Even though her paintings consistently supported the progression and empowerment of women, Münter herself remained deeply conflicted. She longed to be a wife to Kandinsky, embrace domestic duty, and be recognized officially by society as a “good” or “proper” woman. Yet, she also desired to continue her growth as an artist, even without a husband. While, by today’s standards, this may not seem like a problem, in early twentieth-century Germany these two desires flatly contradicted one another. Münter’s most powerfully symbolic images contemplate their reconciliation. In a 1902 diary entry that began as a letter to Kandinsky, Münter explores her two options.

My idea of happiness is a domesticity as cozy and harmonious as I could make it & someone who wholly & always belongs to me – but – it does not have to be that way at all – if it does not come about & if I do not find the right man – I am still very content & happy I intend now to find pleasure in work again...Kandinsky is an awfully dear, nice fellow – I hope that I am not so demented as to imagine that to be love... if only I knew what to do! – if only I could find some relief!⁵⁸

Münter seems to advocate and advance the unconventional, empowering and equilibrating notion that a *man* could belong to a *woman*. Because she so clearly states that her work would continue happily despite finding a man, it is obvious that her ambition does not revolve around marriage or possession by a man. However, likely wearied by her

⁵⁷ Anthony, *Feminism in Germany*, 251.

⁵⁸ Hoberg, *Letters and Reminiscences*, 38.

conflicted existence, Münter altered her desires in 1913, clearly determined to marry Kandinsky.

I should like once again to remind you please to obtain the necessary papers for the marriage while you are there [in Petersburg]. I have already told you on various occasions that I dislike it when *you* write “Mrs. Münter” in the address. I *only* like to be addressed that way when talking to people who want to show me their respect – “close acquaintances” who are courteous. If this had occurred to you yourself & long ago, I could feel differently and more comfortable about it coming from you too. At any rate it is for you and you alone to give me a right to the title [of “Mrs.”].⁵⁹

That year, the liaison began to crumble. By 1914, the First World War began to destroy Europe, closing borders and estranging combative, divided nations. At this point, Gabriele Münter and Wassily Kandinsky reached a difficult stage in their companionship. German officials branded Kandinsky, a Russian living in Germany, as an enemy alien. To protect himself, he fled to Russia late in 1914, leaving Münter alone in war-torn Germany. Instead of remaining in Germany, Münter began planning a journey to Sweden, which remained neutral during the war. She pleaded with Kandinsky to meet her there as soon as he could. By this time, Kandinsky’s correspondence dwindled, and his infrequent letters were filled with excuses not to join her. He lamented his financial strains and alleged that his mother had fallen ill and that he would like to remain with her in Russia. At long last, Münter received a proper letter from Kandinsky, instructing her to wait until July of 1915 to depart for Sweden. However, the letter also bore ominous tidings for the dicey relationship, one now fading in wartime. Though lengthy, this letter set the stage for Münter’s highly emotional Scandinavian period. Kandinsky wrote:

Now I have been living alone for three months and realize that this is the appropriate way of life for me. I miss you often. Often I want to go out with you, speak with you, take a short trip with you, etc. Linked to that are my sorrow and worry about you, about your feelings of loneliness, about your fear of the future. But clarity about myself continues to elude me...It

⁵⁹ Ibid., 151.

simply is not my talent – to be clear in myself concerning my personal life. I am too impulsive in this respect, too distracted and maybe too moody. Only in art do I really know, completely and unerringly, what I want. That is why I achieve something too. In my personal life, I do not know *what* I should, or want, to give to whom. I really want only one thing (*that* I know): that no one suffer because of me... Such a person must live alone. Only at this point where my art and life meet must I have absolute freedom. Every restriction is true suffering for me. I sometimes terribly envy those people who go out together, come home together, spend the night together and wake up with the feeling, with the knowledge: ‘he is here’, ‘she is here.’ I know that this envy is unproductive, because such a life can only make me happy for a brief moment, then I immediately long for freedom, to be alone. Above all to be alone. Perhaps it is only due to the fact that my ideal of love is greater than my ability to realize it. Perhaps sometime in my life I really loved ‘her’ and failed to meet her in this life again. Perhaps I am looking for her. If these words hurt you, don’t forget that I suffer no less from them. I want to give my heart away and am incapable of doing it. Perhaps I lack the ability. Love (according to my ideal) must be infinite and fruitful in every way. I only love art *that* way. Perhaps two such loves are impossible in my heart. Or perhaps I am impotent in terms of human love. This love, of which I speak, you have also never experienced and never had. That is why I tell you (maybe half unconsciously) that you never loved me. And life together as husband and wife without this love is a compromise with a great or lesser aftertaste of a lie, that is, of sin... Today my heart aches and today I almost feel like crying. When I think of you, my heart aches as if it would burst sometimes and I want to shed my blood for you. You must never forget and must constantly feel that I, who ruined your life, actually am prepared to shed my blood for you. Those are not exaggerated and not insignificant words, my dear, dear good, kind Ella.⁶⁰

Fearful of the battle and hoping to remain with Kandinsky, Münter withdrew to Sweden in 1915, a neutral territory in the First World War. Despite her pleading, Kandinsky only visited Münter once during this period of exile. After his departure, the two never saw each other again. Shortly after he arrived in Russia, Kandinsky married a young woman named Nina von Andreevskaya. He did this unbeknownst to Münter, who continued to pine for him in letters. Kandinsky failed to respond to her letters, and almost entirely ceased correspondence with her in May of 1917.

⁶⁰ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 22-23.

Münter left behind supportive friendships with fellow artists, the beauty and safety of Murnau, and the nurturing, tolerant, and raffish artistic communities in Munich. In my opinion, this is when Münter constructed her first major visual expansion in the portrayal of femininities, embodied most obviously by a distinct forfeit of previous control and an emphasis on vulnerability. There is no doubt that the failing relationship with Kandinsky devastated her. He had effectively strung her along with tenuous promises of marriage. She admonished him heatedly for his failure to follow through. Regardless of her plight, Münter attempted resiliently to assimilate within the Scandinavian culture, diligently studying Swedish to improve her communication abilities. However, she never quite assimilated into Swedish society as she had hoped. Therefore, she remained an outsider. This position, while less than ideal for Münter, enabled her to paint the world from a distant, detached perspective.

Distressed by Kandinsky's silence, Germany's steady wartime disintegration, the deaths of Franz Marc and August Macke on the battlefields, and the dissolution of *Der Blaue Reiter*, Münter transformed her style. In 1917, Münter embarked on a series of highly symbolic portraits of Gertrude Holz, her favored model of the time.⁶¹ This highly significant period in the wake of Kandinsky's withdrawal and in the midst of the war is vital to understanding Münter's evolving symbolisms. Her evocative portraits of women in interiors apparently surfaced during periods of deep emotional distress. The paintings, once vivacious and merry, shifted to feature themes of intense isolation, loneliness, and despair. Additionally, I believe Münter created these masterworks as a visual commentary on the fragile and vulnerable position of women during the war.

⁶¹ Ibid., 25.

During this period, Münter painted an astounding portrait entitled *The Future (Woman in Stockholm)* (fig. 7). The large vertical canvas depicts a solitary female figure. She gazes serenely out from the scene, her mouth curved into a slight smile. Behind her, a beautiful bouquet of blossoming tulips bursts open in front of a large window. Through it, viewers can see the lengthy shadows cast by the sun as it seems to sink below an invisible horizon. The rich, creamy orange of the illuminated building, the deep blue of the sky, and vibrant yellow of the flowers behind the woman bathe the subject in great swirls of vibrant color. The rosy curtains on either side of the window frame the woman, once again employing a visual trick of demarcating boundaries, as I illustrated previously in *Boating*. Münter certainly became known for her liberal use of color and color harmonies. Here, she uses color to create symmetry. The woman is clothed in a blue frock, a color mimicked by the sky above her, still evoking the now distant helmswoman of the rowboat. The red curtains frame the window, but also the woman's broad shoulders. Between these two, the window frame rises from behind her, a magnificent cool purple, combining the hues of the sky, frock and curtains. I think it fair to call this a Rectangular Harmony, as Münter has incorporated imaginative color harmonies on a linear, rectangular plane. The green foliage of the plant mirrors the emerald chair upon which the woman sits. Lastly, Münter has carefully inserted splashes of yellow in a notable diamond pattern around the canvas. The yellow light caresses the side of the woman's face and ear, leading our eyes to the rich buttercup hue of the fragile tulips, two of which swing upward to guide our gaze to a triangular detail on the building outside. This exterior structure is illuminated by the sun's warm light, which sweeps downward across the architecture, creating the descending slope of the color triangle. Interestingly, the V-neckline on the woman's blue tunic finishes the diamond shape. Münter has once again incorporated a color harmony in this pattern as well. The blue frock and the

yellow diamond are framed by the green chair and green foliage of the plant on either side of the woman. Combining blue and yellow results in green, and Münter has alluded to that chromatic fusion in what I will call the super-imposed Diamond Harmony. Once again, Münter has framed her singular heroine in color, this time using a tilted plane to create a diamond shape.

The woman, whose shoulder, neck and face viewers see, sits at the very base of the canvas, tilting the focal point. While our eyes find her face first, they quickly travel upward, finding the flowers and the building outside. Münter has created a sense of entrapment, a feeling she herself experienced during this period. The visual evocations of femininities in this piece are manifold. If conflicting femininities are dictated by intuition and reasoning, where does this piece fit into the expanding definition of the subject? Using the Rectangular and Diamond harmonies as a reference point, I believe that Münter visually suggests the integral nature of woman, straining to thrive in an overpowering, inimical and untrustworthy world. The harmonies cannot exist without the female figure at the bottom, whose blouse completes each Harmony in color and shape. Without her form, the piece is an unbalanced, and seemingly unfinished, still life, just as the world would be lopsided and incomplete without women. This painting epitomizes Münter's portrayal of women as logical, intuitive, essentially constructive and harmoniously integral.

An additional key element of femininity I will not discount rises from the larger socio-cultural sphere: a woman's special vulnerability in war. Stories of the torture of women during the war would have likely reached Münter. I believe she wanted to emphasize a woman's exposure to the horrors of war and the loneliness experienced by women on the homefront whose male companions had joined the war effort, many never to return. Unfortunately, thousands of women fell prey to the brutal hands of enemy soldiers

and many of these victims did not survive repeated attacks. Those who did were forced to accept the horrific shame of such incidents, including sexual violence. They felt profoundly disloyal to their nations, their husbands, boyfriends, or families. In some instances, women felt shackled to the fetus growing within them, the child of the enemy soldier. These fears and worries plagued European women of wartime. Münter subtly includes this fear in this canvas, carefully concealed beneath a colorful, Fauvist palette. The woman is at the very bottom of the scene, anchoring the chromatic Harmonies, but also dominated by the background, which towers above her. Women are threatened, not only by war, but also by stereotypes and traditions that a woman should remain in the household, and not seek a career. Like a swelling tidal wave gathering force before it reaches its destructive peak, the domestic background and exterior, bizarre cityscape loom mightily behind the woman, threatening to trap her in a chaotic sea of traditional household obligations and stereotypical maternal gender roles.

Above all, Münter's representations of women peeking out from the bottom of a canvas, personified her attempts to avoid sexualizing the model's figure. Her figures are intelligent, contemplative women. Münter does not flaunt feminine sexuality, but emphasizes women in thought, experiencing emotion, or participating in avant-garde movements. The woman in this image embodies the latter. She is depicted wearing the *Bubikopf*, the short, boyish cropped haircut popular among the early New Women. The New Woman, though sexualized by society, ultimately punctured the boundaries that surrounded women for centuries. A new femininity did not mean that a woman could be exploited for her sexuality, but rather be recognized for the integral role she played in the advancement of modern society predicated upon the mutual rights and representations of men and women.

Similar themes may be observed in Münter's 1917 work entitled *Meditation* (fig. 8). Once again, we see a lone female heroine on the left side of the canvas, her hand tucked gingerly by her mouth in a posture of deep contemplation. Her gaze looks up and away from us, leading our eye to Münter's signature uncommonly in the upper left-hand corner. She is clothed in a heavy black and white coat and sits before a table bearing a few plump fruits, a lamp, and a bouquet of starkly outlined violet flowers, almost like cloisonné. The background is rife with chaotic motion, a variety of zigzagging brushstrokes and plant foliage, all caught in a whirlwind of colors. At first glance, this painting seems more saturnine and gloomy than the previous image. Münter's palette is dulled, hosting more dark tones rather than the riotous, Fauvist colors she used in *The Future*. The high contrast on the woman's face draws our eye to her, but her eyes guide our gaze to Münter's signature. The arrangement of the flowers nods us toward the barred window in the far background, a source of light illuminating the table. A drooping crimson flower leads us to the red lamp on the far right side, and we follow its base to the table. A short distance from the lamp lays a plate of juicy fruit, which then guides our eyes back to the woman on the left. Münter has painted the line of the gaze to follow an oval shape that proceeds in a clockwise motion. What is important to remember is the concept that femininities can indicate power. The woman visually controls via her gaze the way we look at the painting. But Münter as the painter has created the scene. Here, the controls are entirely in the woman's hands. The model need not even look at us to command attention. She is the unwitting apex, lost in thought and we are left only to observe her pensive countenance.

As I discussed in the previous example, Münter has once more concealed the model's body intentionally. The woman's arms are crossed in front of her chest and the flowing, black blouse hides the curves of the model's breasts from view. This illustrates

Münter's regard and sympathy toward the woman as a person, rather than genitalia, and demonstrates Münter's intentions for the painting. The piece is not meant to allow the viewer to examine carefully the woman's body, but rather invites a dive into the stream of a solitary woman's consciousness and permits the viewer to explore her luminous chamber – almost like a chapel of self-absorption and introspection presided over by a female votary. What is she thinking about? Where is she?

Münter placed a lone female figure at the mercy of a larger, domineering domestic “homescape”. Typically backgrounds play a cameo role in portraiture, but Münter has allowed it to share the stage forcefully. Why? Neither woman interacts with her environment. It seems as if Münter is suggesting that femininity lies outside of the bounds of the home, even when a woman may appear physically trapped within it. The model turns her back to the table, a symbol of domestic stability. She does not admire the flowers behind her, which are classic representations of femininity and womanhood. In fact, the crimson flower appears to be bent, broken and wilting. This could be a reference to the death of traditional views of femininities, surrendering to a new, broader concept of femininities in which the woman is permitted to free herself thoughtfully, introspectively from the confines of the homescape. Compare this to Münter's painting *Boating* completed seven years prior. Out in the unpredictable nature, freed from domestic space, Münter takes control of the situation, portraying herself as the rower of the tiny vessel. Though Kandinsky rises above the boating party (much like the large, mountainous backdrops of her Murnau pictures and the overwhelming built-up backgrounds of her Scandinavian portraits), he does not have the dominant placement. I do believe that Münter desired to lock herself into a linear plane with Kandinsky, but her rowing balances his standing. She has portrayed them as inspired, propulsive *equals*.

Münter's depictions of femininities in her Scandinavian art provide us with insight into her thought processes regarding the conflicted circumstances of modern, European womanhood. Using her paintings as her voice, Münter suggests that femininities, though still trapped within social customs and domesticity, still threatened by the hands of men, are a burgeoning manifestation of cultural and gender power. Above all, she views and paints women with understanding and deepest sympathy for their plight, but also with a longing for the well-balanced domestic life that she wanted to experience freely.

Fauvist Influences and Techniques

As Münter expanded her oeuvre, her visual endeavors continuously focused on emotionally vibrant representations of familiar, everyday situations. Her colorful, exuberant Expressionist paintings clearly display influences from French Fauvism. This wildly hued artistic movement flourished in France beginning in the fateful summer of 1905 with audacious, joint, artful experiments of André Derain and Henri Matisse. I believe Münter was, for at least part of her career, the finest Fauvist painter operating in Germany dramatically enhancing and expanding the liberating agenda of Fauve artistry. This is not surprising since her aesthetic base of operation, Munich, was home to the Galerie Moderne. This is where the Thannhauser family, premier, urbane art entrepreneurs, presented multiple exhibitions and sales of modern French canvases over the period 1905-1915. This innovative, entrepreneurial importer of foreign artistic inventions culminated in a magnificent display of Cézanne and Picasso. The Thannhauser Galerie also held the first exhibition of the *Neue Künstlervereinigung München* (New Artist's Association of Munich). The exhibition travelled during 1910 to several German cities, which resulted in considerable publicity outside of Munich. Münter travelled extensively and visited Paris herself in 1906. Two years later, Münter exhibited ten paintings and eleven prints at the Thannhauser Galerie.

In this chapter, I will assert the crucial role of Fauvism in the development and maturation of Münter's Expressionist oeuvre, whether overt or understated. Münter captures with masterly skills both the passionate and emotional characteristics of German Expressionism, while simultaneously referencing Fauvism's audacious, idiosyncratic color-form pictorial organization.

To investigate this theme thoroughly, I will compare Münter's paintings to the most prominent Fauve, Henri Matisse. Utilizing visual and written evidence, I intend to reveal the tight and important similarities of color palette, paint application, and subject matter that will reveal Münter's affiliations with and international expansion of Fauvism. The four main areas of Münter's art that I will investigate are her still life paintings, including her paintings of interior spaces, her daring use of color, her persistent use of flattened color planes as backgrounds to eliminate easy contextualization, and her utilization of distorted perspectives. I seek to show clearly that Münter is a *flâneuse*, a keen observer of her environment, just as her male Fauve counterparts exploited the wandering habits and roving eye of *flâneurs*.

I will utilize a number of Münter's paintings to demonstrate these Fauvist similarities. Simultaneously, I will compare them to contemporaneous Fauve paintings, French works in particular, to show Münter's fascination with and adoption of this style. My characterization of Münter as a Fauve, and perhaps the most daring, inventive, and persistent of Fauvists in Germany, breaks new ground in contemporary appreciations of Münter, her aesthetic inspirations, and her modern, artful achievements.

Historically, scholars have been reluctant to ascribe any of these obvious similarities to Münter's desire to emulate Fauve artists. Perhaps they feared that doing so would diminish her artistic genius. The reasoning behind this is logical. In nineteenth- and twentieth-century Germany, it became widely held that women merely imitated inventive male genius. For a modern historian to assert now that Münter boldly appropriated the style of her male, Fauve counterparts could be interpreted as an anachronistic assault on her creativity as a woman.

However, Münter's adroit capitalizations on Fauvist painting techniques have not gone entirely unremarked. Art historian Reinhold Heller demonstrates this in two separate passages.

She absorbed influences from Van Gogh, Gauguin, Matisse, and Munch, but less through direct emulation than by obtaining similar effects to those recalled from their paintings through her own means.⁶²

The influence of Jawlensky and, through him, Henri Matisse, has been postulated for this and other Münter paintings from the winter of 1908-09, and indeed the kinship is undeniable. However, rather than simply emulating the two male artists and becoming a twice-removed, female Fauve epigone, Münter saw their example as confirmations of her own synthetic stylistic experiments.⁶³

I believe that Dr. Heller does not emphasize highly enough that the process of achieving similar effects artistically begins with emulation. The manner in which an artist assimilates works of art by others requires the ability to emulate and expand the best characteristics of the target piece. The artist may synthesize these various elements into one cohesive unit, but emulation to excel is key. There is no harm in asserting that Münter discovered profound inspiration in Fauvist painting methods. She sought to imitate these vibrant painterly practices in her own way. Instead of robbing her of inventive credit, I believe we must acknowledge her for actively seeking new and innovative artistic pathways for German art, and incorporating those modern energies in her own work.

Like Expressionism, Fauvism brilliantly rejected the monotonous, high finish of the timeworn French academic style. Its distinguishing and fervent use of color fields, spirited application of paint, and energetic, stylized forms turned away from the traditional aesthetic temperament that called for a realistic palette, succinct brushstrokes, and reserved painterly style. With brashness and blatant disregard for all previous artistic conventions, Fauvism

⁶² Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 107.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

exploded onto the French artistic scene from 1905 onward. Due to its radical nature, the movement experienced acid criticism from contemporary critics and gallery-goers alike. The term 'Fauve', first used in 1905 by critic and art historian Louis Vauxcelles in the popular Parisian serial, *Gil Blas*, simply means "wild beast".⁶⁴ This term indicates the general critical attitude toward Fauvism. The vivacious movement was as unwelcome to the conventional French artistic sphere as the proverbial bull in the china shop. Like many innovative movements before it, Fauvism earned a negative reputation among critics, who saw its devotees' chromatic frenzy as a primitive and barbaric exclamation of aberrant (even psychotic) personal, unjustifiable artistic liberties.

During her *Blauer Reiter* years (1911-1914), Münter experienced a stylistic awakening, experimenting with gestural forms and lines to create a sense of motion and primitive spontaneity. There is neither an attempt at finished pictorial perfection, nor an earnest seeking after realism. Münter's Expressionism essentially distills a fusion between pictorial exposures of conflicted private human natures and the chromatic innovations of Fauvism. This is an endeavor quite similar to Matisse's later artistic experiments. Like many Expressionists, Münter sought to utilize color harmonies and chromatic field patterns, but, ultimately, her work more closely follows the colorful adventures of the Fauves. However, Münter noted that she and Kandinsky never directly associated with many artists in French aesthetic circles.

Kandinsky and I had made several trips to France, though we never associated there with many artists. Most of the time, we were content to visit galleries or, as soon as the weather was fine, to go out on sketching and painting expeditions. But some Paris painters, especially Delaunay and Le Fauconnier, exhibited in our group's shows in Munich. I don't remember meeting most of them personally here. [August] Macke and [Franz] Marc, of

⁶⁴ Dorothea Beard, "A Modern Ut Pictura Poesis: The Legacy of Fauve Color and the Poetry of Wallace Stevens," *Wallace Stevens Journal* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 3-17, accessed April 3, 2016, *Humanities Source*, EBSCOhost.

course, were great friends of Delaunay, who they had met in Paris. They were both enthusiastic about Delaunay's Orphist theories of form and color. Delaunay was jealous, however, of their devotion to Kandinsky.⁶⁵

Despite the lack of personal interaction between groups, I do not doubt that Münter fervently studied Fauve works while in France and in the Paris galleries she assiduously attended. While travelling in France, Münter kept a visual inventory in her sketchbook of all the major artists she had encountered, among them Henri Matisse.⁶⁶ At the second *Blaue Reiter* exhibition in Munich in 1912, Fauve painters André Derain and Maurice de Vlaminck showed their work alongside German Expressionists.

The interplay between avant-garde French artistic circles and innovative German aesthetic movements is crucial to this study. Color had become an intensifying agent of communication in both German and French aesthetic languages, spawning a surge of chromatic messages transmitted energetically into gallery spaces across Europe, but especially in Munich. In Münter's own writing, she credits fellow *Blaue Reiter* artist Alexei Jawlensky with introducing her to vital, native French Fauve sensibilities.

[Jawlensky] was the only one of the four friends [Münter, Kandinsky, Baroness Marianne von Werefkin, and Alexei Jawlensky] who had professional grounding in French avant-garde painting behind him, having spent two periods in France in 1905 and 1907, and he now passed on his knowledge of the art of Henri Matisse, Paul Gauguin and the Nabis group to his fellow painters in Murnau.⁶⁷

Münter adopted these techniques that she learned through Jawlensky's instruction. In 1908, Münter shed her Impressionistic technique in favor of a chromatically unrestrained Fauvist approach. She referred to this period as her "great leap" from creating Impressionistic, *plein-air* sketches to producing richly-colored, slightly abstracted paintings.

⁶⁵ Roditi, *Dialogues*, 120.

⁶⁶ Other names included 'P. Gauguin, von Gogh, Monticelli, Odilon Redon, Cézanne, M. Denis, Berthe Morisot, Degas, Signac, Renoir,' quoted in Behr, "Beyond the Muse," 55.

⁶⁷ Annegret Hoberg, "The Life and Work of Gabriele Münter," in *Gabriele Münter: The Search for Expression 1906-1917* (London: Paul Holberton Publishing, 2005), 21-41.

To begin this examination of Fauvist themes, evident, even catalytic, in Münter's artistry, I will analyze first the paintings of Münter during her pre-war period. Here, investigation of the most common tropes frequently visible in her work is essential. For this study, an artistic trope can be defined as a commonly repeated theme or subject employed by the artist. This will help us identify the patterns of Expressionist femininities explored in Münter's artwork as well as reveal deep Fauvist influences in her style. These Expressionist femininities are represented as the radically avant-garde women participating in leisure pursuits, (The New Woman), or contemplative, traditional women in ordinary settings, who Münter never renders in a sexualized manner.

Münter filled her pre-war oeuvre with abundant still life paintings, landscapes, and portraits. Her earliest work (1902-1914) exhibits her preference to utilize abundant color, staccato brushstrokes, and a frequent tendency to employ techniques championed by Gauguin and exploited by the Fauves in cruder, brasher experiments. These aesthetic choices reveal Münter's awareness of artistic innovations across Europe, as well as her independence to explore these various techniques in unique ways.

Her rampant utilization of bright color began in the early 1900s. Münter mastered documenting the effects of color interplay. In 1909, Münter completed a small oil painting entitled *Gelbes Haus mit Apfelbaum* (Yellow House with Apple Tree) (fig. 9). In this composition, Münter depicted a small, country house surrounded by trees, all painted in lively radiance and bursting color. Even the shadows cast by the swaying branches are rendered in energetic hues of heliotrope and ultramarine. Luminous sunlight bathes the gravel road in gold, flecked with hints of glowing pink. She couples warm, golden tones with dark, cooler tones to create contrasts between different elements of the scene. This is

done very effectively, because Münter colorfully draws the viewer's eye around the entire composition.

This painting exemplifies Münter's fascination with a bold palette. Münter did not hesitate to pair diverse colors to create an effect called simultaneous contrast, or two juxtaposing colors placed side-by-side to amplify the effect of each. This is a technique evident in the works of the Impressionists, Post-Impressionists, and Neo-Impressionists, Orphists, and championed primarily by the Fauves.

Münter frequently repeated this technique. In *Country House (Kandinsky in the Garden)* (fig. 10), 1912, she painted the rural scene in pure colors to reflect the brilliant, rich hues of vibrant summer. She tucked the cozy Bavarian farmhouse behind a small, growing garden. On the left side of the painting, leafy, green trees bend under a warm, summer breeze. Kandinsky stands near the bottom left of the composition, and waters a row of flowers. The two most prominent colors in this composition, red and blue, compete consistently with each other. Once again, Münter demonstrates her clever understanding of color interplay in this piece. Her adroit color-field work here makes the background appear to billow outward brilliantly evoking the plenitude of a summer's day.

These two examples exemplify Münter's dedication to *plein air* painting. This removes her further from the Expressionist tradition. Expressionist artists worked primarily in studios. This structured environment, shielded from the elements, allowed Expressionists the time to contemplate the complexity of human emotion they sought to convey.⁶⁸ However, Münter focused frequently her more organic artistic attentions on depicting scenes of rural life in Bavaria. Because of this, she often painted outdoors.

⁶⁸ Some Expressionist artists continued to paint outdoors in order to sketch scenes for later paintings, which were then completed in their studios. However, because the world of Expressionism is primarily internal, most did not make a habit out of it.

Münter further distinguished herself from the Expressionist artists by rendering her subjects in abstract color alone, rather than combining the former technique with stylistic abstraction. This became an identifiable theme in Münter's pre-war artwork. While the color use is abstract, the subject itself is not. Münter rendered the scene in a recognizable manner, though she obscured the image with radiant color. Though she did briefly experiment with abstraction in 1914, likely due to Kandinsky's influence, she did not favor it. This sets her apart from Kandinsky, who ultimately pursued an entirely non-representational style. This individual style verifies that Münter did not merely imitate men's work, even the ones closest to her. Instead, she formed a style completely unique to her based on emulation and reinvention of existing techniques.

Despite her artistic autonomy, Münter experienced doubt that her artwork lived up to modern aesthetic quality standards. This is evidenced by a subtle trope in Münter's numerous portraits. The artist regularly portrayed her human figures with hidden hands, some beneath tables, and others just beyond the canvas boundary. I do not believe this is accidental. As early sketches reveal, Münter was proficient at illustrating hands, expertly rendering the sinuous curves of fingers, knuckles, and palms. This is a profound tribute to historical female artists. In early modern European female self-portraits, woman artists frequently painted themselves with their hands as a focal point.⁶⁹ This emphasized the mastery a woman could achieve on canvas utilizing her own talent and highlighting the skill her hands possessed to create the painting. It was considered fashionable, and slightly scandalous, to expose one's hands in self-portraiture as a visual affirmation of skill, talent, and prestige. In fact, many women did this to assuage doubts about their professionalism

⁶⁹ *Self Portrait* by Judith Leyster, 1630, *Self Portrait as the Allegory of Painting* by Artemisia Gentileschi, 1638-1639, and *Self Portrait in a Tondo* by Lavina Fontana, 1579, are excellent examples of artistic women's desires to confirm their skills by rendering their hands in self-portraiture.

among viewers and to confirm visually that they were the creators of the painting. Even in later examples created by fellow Expressionists, like Paula Modersohn-Becker (1876-1907), the artist's hands are delicately revealed as a clear sign of her talent.

Münter refrained from representing her own hands in numerous key portraits (*Self Portrait in Front of an Easel*, 1908-1909, *Boating*, 1910, *Self Portrait*, 1910; figs. 11, 6, 12 respectively). Neglecting to include her hands suggests artistic modesty. However, her assertive position at her easel commands attention and proclaims her presence in the current and historical artistic communities.

The situation in which Münter portrays herself – at an easel, palette and brushes in hand, working on a painting – is a frequently depicted one in the history of self-portraiture by such diverse artists as Rembrandt, Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun, Vincent van Gogh and Arnold Böcklin. Her broad-rimmed straw hat may represent a particular homage to Van Gogh and a desire to associate her work with this most prototypical of Expressionism's precursors, but Münter above all situates herself here proudly in the company of professional artists; she employs the large self-portrait as an announcement of her own artistic maturity and of her art's competition with that of the past and the present. The self-doubt that appears to be expressed in the conflicting components of the face and its surroundings may be an indication of the anxiety she felt in entering this historical competition and submitting her works for public exhibition.⁷⁰

At the time of the creation of this painting, Münter found herself suspended in difficult social circumstances. She had just recently purchased her new home in Murnau, had begun to experience artistic success, but remained disappointed by Kandinsky's reluctance to obtain a divorce from his first wife as he had promised. Ending his marriage legally would have enabled Münter to pursue a relationship with him, without the hindrance of fierce social pressures energized by the German bourgeois conception of "respectability". Though she sits assertively at her easel, her expression remains timid, perhaps as a means of confessing her acute self-doubt in her artistry.

⁷⁰ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 122-123.

Münter's timidity is challenged or balanced by her rampant use of color and abstracted form. However, Münter's coy reluctance to grant her own hands a place in her paintings continues to present a distinctive trope in her work, as well as in the work of other key Fauve painters. Frequently, Henri Matisse and other Fauves like Maurice de Vlaminck and André Derain neglected to illustrate their own hands in self-portraits. Instead, Fauves highlighted the complexities of human facial expressions, rather than emphasizing the hands that created the portrait. Münter's frequent choice to hide her own hands from view conveys not only her self-consciousness as an artist, but also reflects her awareness of current Fauvist artistic trends and codes.

There is one notable exception to this trend in Münter's artwork. In 1910, Münter completed a traditional seated self-portrait entitled *An der Staffelei*, or "At the Easel" (fig. 13). In this piece, Münter depicts herself sitting with her palette in her left hand, while her right hand holds her brush, carefully dabbing strokes onto the canvas. Her facial expression is soft and contemplative. She does not address the viewer, but sits quietly and paints. Her hand is rendered without any substantial detail. She reveals only the sinuous curve of her fingers as she clutches the brush gingerly in her right hand.

This particular composition bears resemblance to self-portraits by female artists like Elisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun of eighteenth-century France, seventeenth-century Dutch artist Judith Leyster, and Artemisia Gentileschi of sixteenth-century Italy. These women painted their likenesses in captivating, meticulous detail, and depicted clearly their hands holding paintbrushes to affirm the validity of the image as one they had created. In this image, Münter acknowledges in her own way this legacy of early modern European feminine artistry.

Münter's extensive travels with Kandinsky exposed her to these numerous artistic styles. In 1906, Kandinsky and Münter travelled to Paris, arriving in late May. There, they each began a new branch of intensive artistic study. Münter focused on the creation of linocuts, which are created by carving a relief into the flat surface with a sharp knife, then inked with a brayer (roller), and finally imprinted onto paper or fabric. During this French study phase, Münter played with the various abilities of line to convey space and form. Linocuts became essential to this period of experimentation. Once again, she experimented with heavily-outlined figures and objects, a technique repeated in later artistic endeavors, such as *Hinterglasmalerei*, or paintings behind glass. While in France, she hesitantly began to eliminate background space and depth, much in the manner of contemporary innovators like Vlaminck, Derain, and Matisse. To achieve this effect successfully, she consulted with fellow Expressionist artist, Alexei Jawlensky. He remained well-acquainted with the art of the Pont-Aven School as well as with the French Nabis. Jawlensky had even worked in Matisse's own studio in 1907. Münter and Jawlensky began to discuss their desires for a greater way to illustrate space and depth, utilizing color as an independent spatial agent. Jawlensky introduced Münter to the concept of artistic "Synthesis", or the reduction of objects to their most simplified forms.

In a landscape painting entitled *View of Murnau Moors* (1908) (fig. 14), Münter applies this style. This is a notable example of her adoption and emulation of Fauvist aesthetics. She creates a piece with, "...bold, simplified shapes of farmhouses and trees [that] are outlined in black; the paint is applied in smooth, flat areas, and there are no shadows. Space and depth are created with color only."⁷¹ Münter also employs skillfully the Renaissance technique of atmospheric perspective, or the illusion of depth and distance created by

⁷¹ Bachrach, "Comparison of Early Landscapes", 23.

rendering them in paler, bluer tones than nearby objects and scenery. Fauve use of this technique can be found in paintings such as *Charing Cross Bridge, London* (1906) by Andre Derain and Henri Matisse's study for *Luxe, Calme et Volupté* (1904) (figs. 15,16). The background recedes gently and gradually into a misty haze of blue pigment. Because utilizing atmospheric perspective softened the overall effect of depth, many Expressionists avoided using color to depict distance. In contrast, Expressionists created a sense of distorted perspective with jagged lines and irregular forms to emphasize emotional instability and turmoil.

Many other Expressionist painters used perspective to express the same attitude to space – a telescoping of distance so that we are drawn into the picture in a headlong rush.⁷²

Münter's ready acceptance of atmospheric perspective illustrates her desires to operate outside the bounds of Expressionism, and appropriate the strategies of the Fauves. Further evidence of this desire is Münter's choice of subject matter. Quite unlike Kandinsky and the other *Blaue Reiter* Expressionists, Münter did not emphasize metaphysical realities in her paintings. Instead, she focused on illustrating scenes of ordinary life. In this way, Münter more closely aligned herself with the Fauves, known for the simplicity, even primitiveness, of their subjects.

In 1905, Henri Matisse, emerging as a key leader of the Fauvist movement, completed his famous *The Green Stripe*, a portrait of his wife, Amelie (fig. 17). She sits in close proximity to the threshold of the canvas where we, as viewers, are positioned. She teeters close to the edge, her face illuminated by a bizarre green stripe that runs vertically from her hairline to the edge of her chin. There, it dissolves into messy brushstrokes and a

⁷² Stan Smith, *Anatomy, Perspective, and Composition for the Artist* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, Inc., 1984), 112.

strip of shadow. She averts her gaze from the viewer, almond eyes peering out unblinkingly from her seat. The rest of her features are comprised of a series of spontaneous brushstrokes knit together into a cohesive, thickly painted impasto. The background behind the seated woman radiates in colorful waves, including blue, purple, and bright orange. Each was likely applied straight from the tube to prevent diminishing the pure color of the pigments.

This painting showcases Matisse's wildly clever spatial arrangements. In this composition, he created an impenetrable color wall, obliterating all sense of realistic depth, perspective, and context. Amelie is pressed to the forefront of the canvas, placed among ambiguous surroundings. She cannot retreat into the background because her environment is comprised of flattened color planes.

This technique, reminiscent of portraiture by Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), became a vital foundational element of Fauvism. The utilization of matte color emphasizes the flatness of the canvas and directs the viewer's attention to the quirky subject alone. There is no symbolism in the background to compete for attention. These types of portraits focus on the sitter's face and shoulders, granting them significance uninterrupted by a plain, flattened background.

Münter employs precisely the same technique in a painting entitled *Portrait of a Young Woman*, completed in 1909 (fig. 18). Münter's equally experimental piece features a well-dressed young woman in her riding clothes. Münter painted only her waist, shoulders, and head. She extends her left arm to the side, likely reaching for something to steady herself while she stands stationary in an opaque sea of aquatic blue and green. Her coat drapes itself smartly across her shoulders, accentuating her frame. However, the rest of her body disappears beneath the fabric of her outfit. Münter has placed heavy emphasis upon the

woman's clothing, contrasting the cool green tones of the woman's blouse with the warm pink hues of her tie. The woman's hat is balanced on a thick mane of honey brown curls that cast the left side of her face in faint shadow. Similar to *The Green Stripe*, the subject of this painting cannot navigate her surroundings. She is pressed against the forefront of the canvas.

Yet another prime example of Münter's preference to flatten spatial environments can be found in her maternal image *Mother with Child in Gray Dress* (1925) (fig. 19). Once again, Münter relies upon color fields to designate visual space and movement. She further emphasizes this technique with the medium itself. This is a pristine example of one of Münter's many *Hinterglasmalerei*. This folk art medium, invented by the resourceful rural Bavarian peasantry in the nineteenth century, piqued Münter's interest in primitive art. After her exposure to these pictures, Münter pursued clear emulation of folk art. The scene lacks a clear background, a common theme in Münter's images. The mother clutches her child in a loving embrace, gingerly placing her cheek to her daughter's, while the little girl turns to face the viewer. Both mother and daughter wear simple blue smocks, and share vivid red hair, rosy lips, and clear blue eyes. Münter highlights the relationship between the two by reducing the background to a sea of ultramarine paint. Münter seldom constructed images of humans interacting with their surroundings, as many Expressionists did. Rather, she articulated the importance of the subject without emphasizing their circumstances and environment.

By employing color as negative space, both Münter and Matisse showcase their subjects' identities. Their figures occupy environments entirely alone, placed against a bright but flattened color plane. The viewer cannot enter or explore the space behind the subject, or place subjects within any recognizable spatial context.

To be clear, this is not an Expressionist technique. This is a disorienting visual trope highly prized by French Fauvist painters. Expressionist artists frequently painted their figures in recognizable scenes to illustrate how people react to and interact with their circumstances. Alexei Jawlensky, who painted in Matisse's studio, is the notable exception.⁷³ Conversely, Fauvism focused on creating flattened color planes as "space" instead of recognizable environments. This showcased color interplay between the subject and her background. Combining ordinary subjects with opaque and mysterious backgrounds clearly evokes Münter's embrace and refinement of Fauvism.

Now, I will investigate a more complex example further to demonstrate Münter's Fauvist influences, but also her personal conceptions of femininity. In a 1908-1909 painting, *Return from Shopping (In the Streetcar)*, Münter places the visual emphasis on a small pile of daintily wrapped packages resting softly on the lap of an unidentified woman riding in a streetcar (fig. 20). Here, the viewer's position is quite awkward, yet boldly emphasized. Viewers cannot see both the woman's face, nor the bottom half on her body, a typical predicament of the metropolitan *flâneuse*. Münter only renders the woman's torso, her gloved hands, a small, decorative purse, and the little pile of packages on her lap. The anonymity of the composition disrupts any sense of intimacy with the subject, creating a modern pictorial urban environment of uncertainty and existential dilemma, even unease. The question arises: "Who is she?" Unlike previously investigated works, Münter now seems to highlight enigmatic aspects of the subject, rather than her background. The viewer cannot fully interact with the woman's form, nor can she interact with those watching her. No reciprocal gaze of acknowledgement lures us into the subject's world. The space is impermeable, not only because the woman does not invite us in, but also because Münter

⁷³ Jawlensky's portraiture often employs this Fauve technique. *Girl with Peonies* (1914), *Spring* (1912), and *Alexander Sarcharov, the Dancer* (1909) remain prime examples of Jawlensky's commitment to this style.

does not let us enter. The vibrant blue of the woman's dress becomes an impassable color plane to hinder the viewer's venture into the scene and into the life of the sitter.

While this demonstrates Münter's clever utilization of Fauve techniques, it also expresses her personal views of womanhood. The woman's torso is reduced to darkness to avoid exploiting her sexuality. This is clearly intentional. The figure's guarded sexuality sits in direct opposition to the highly sexualized and often exploitive images of women in public places that have been the focus of artists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As mentioned previously, Münter explores her female subjects with evident discretion, sympathy, and understanding of their precarious situations.

Münter eliminated all such references [to female sexuality]. The manner in which the woman is depicted as she sits in the streetcar with her packages and purse testifies to Münter's sympathy for and understanding of her peer. Münter's vision and focus, defined through her sex, encompassed a different reality than what her male contemporaries presented. Her vision necessarily echoed the limits imposed on her sex, but also reflected her own interests.⁷⁴

This is a clear display of Münter's perception of femininity and its many limitations. Illustrating a woman in this way creates complications. Presenting the form of a woman without precise contextual evidence of her surroundings, other than her position in the streetcar, eliminates most predetermined notions regarding her background, social standing, and experiences. It only allows the viewer to make inferences based upon closer observations. It is difficult to develop opinions based upon the woman alone, rather than forming inferences regarding her position in society based on her interior or exterior surroundings. This tactic liberates the women of Münter's artwork. She invites the viewer to interpret the image, filling in the gaps she intentionally leaves in the visual narrative. In this sense, this unique portrait acts both as a still life and as an acknowledgement of the vagrancy and inherent confusions of the *flânerie*.

⁷⁴ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 98.

By painting this particular image, Münter cast herself into the role of observer, or *flâneuse*. This became an inherently modern phenomenon, as previously women were merely the objects of male stares. To approach and explore the world around them in relative safety, women disguised their female identities.

Rather than celebrate their indulgence in multiple scopic possibilities, women have long wished for admission to the coveted realms of the spectacle, a right-of-way into the new spaces of *flânerie* [*flâneuse*] and to an experience of the images of modernity. Only when chaperoned by companions, disguised in men's clothes, or covered by other means of subterfuge, was this entrance even partially and tentatively possible, as a trial and exception.⁷⁵

Münter assumed the role of the *flâneuse* to create *Return from Shopping*. Shopping created a rare opportunity for a woman to explore the streets, occasionally without a companion. These infrequent moments allowed women to observe and study their surroundings. Each glimpse and glance revealed to these watchful women some truth about the world. If female wanderings remained unnoticed, women became more than the passive spectator or object of view, especially the nominative male gaze. Women could make silent judgments about their observations, or react privately to events they witnessed.

This image acts as a visual recitation of Münter's own nomadic observations. It is important to consider Münter in the role of the *flâneuse* when I compare her to the Fauves, all of whom were notoriously observant and irreverent *flâneurs*. Münter consistently documented what she saw, whether in the forms of painting, drawing, or writing. She never composed paintings based on academic standards, but rather painted what she saw. "I do not compose. I saw something that pleased me, noted it down and painted it."⁷⁶

It is clear that Münter was a keen, even cunning observer of modern life. The practice of scopic examination also applies to her creation of still life paintings. Unlike

⁷⁵ Katharina von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 70.

⁷⁶ Bachrach, "Comparison of Early Landscapes", 23.

Expressionism, Fauvism championed the portrayal of ordinary scenes. Still life paintings became the most important connection Münter shared with many of the Fauves.

Münter's still lifes assault the commonality of objects. They grant significance to the mundane, and exalt their reality from the commonplace to poetic prominence... However, even as in her painting vocabulary she pioneered Expressionism, her commitment to the still life was not shared by other artists associated with the movement. Only Jawlensky and August Macke, both admirers of Münter's work, painted a significant amount of still lifes; others avoided them. Münter's sex is important, not because it somehow gave her a predisposition to still lifes, but because the still life was of little value by other Expressionist artists, almost all of whom were male.⁷⁷

In accordance with academic training, still lifes were often considered “women's work” by conventional art teachers and critics. Historical artistic customs maintained that prosaic subject matter should be considered insignificant, and therefore unworthy of a man's creative energies. In fact, Münter placed herself into a precarious professional situation by exhibiting so many still lifes. She risked ridicule and dismissal as an amateur artist, something easy for her contemporaries to prove, as she was a woman. However, her endeavors to paint still lifes could have been inspired by her desire to compete with the progressive male painters of her time. Very few male Expressionist artists devoted much attention to creating still life paintings. However, still lifes became deeply appealing to the French Fauvists, alive to all the beauties of Hellenic-Roman Mediterranean artistic culture.

The genre of still life painting has existed since ancient Rome, and is most often associated with rhopography, the small, incidental, everyday things in life, where nothing significant is happening – the opposite of megalography, history painting and great heroic deeds... Still life continued to be associated with feminine space and the everyday world of domesticity into the twentieth century.⁷⁸

It is very likely that Münter was “inspired by the great role still life played in the contemporary French avant-garde, in which the leading Fauve and the Cubist paintings

⁷⁷ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 99.

⁷⁸ Julie M. Johnson, “Rediscovering Helene Funke: The Invisible Foremother,” *Woman's Art Journal* 29, no. 1 (2008): 34, accessed November 1, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20358144>.

consistently employed still-life motifs.”⁷⁹ Münter’s still life paintings did not seek to answer complex metaphysical questions, or investigate symbolic ideologies. Rather, she created them to give more vibrant life to the mundane. She expertly utilized the historical technique of rhopography, the practice of creating visually appealing paintings prominently featuring commonplace, overlooked objects to promote a sense of aesthetic pleasure. While Münter was not the only modern European woman artist to concentrate on still life paintings, the diversity and quality of her images appraise and challenge the historical requirements of this technique.⁸⁰

Münter did not restrict herself to traditional depictions of still life imagery. She confronted the limitations of still lifes, and cultivated a new approach to the timeworn technique. Instead of traditional depictions of still life flotsam (food, floral arrangements, letters, books, etc.), Münter experimented by rendering interior spaces as still lifes. Private, domestic spaces became just as commonplace as conventional still life subject matter. The benefit of this technique allowed Münter to include figures, usually solitary women, in the interior space. Münter elevates mundane surroundings by shaping them into a still life, while simultaneously granting significance to the human subject. The two elements of the image complement each other. This contradicts directly Münter’s spatially-disorienting images of lone figures placed against flat backgrounds. However, I believe her mastery of both techniques reveals more clearly her commitment to Fauvist artistic principles.

While a single woman in an interior space is nothing new in the history of art, Münter’s innovative expressions of such a situation become colorfully unique in an essentially Franco-German Fauvist style. When placing a woman in a definable space,

⁷⁹ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 102.

⁸⁰ Helene Funke, a little-known Fauvist and Expressionist who painted primarily in Vienna, utilized this artistic mechanism. Her known oeuvre is comprised of multiple still life images. Very little is known about Funke, but there is evidence that she frequently exhibited with the Fauves, most notably Matisse.

Münter often situates her toward the bottom of the canvas. The woman's form is not an essential factor in displaying her femininity. Instead, the space around her dominates the visual narrative. Refining a technique used by the Fauves, Münter employs the space around her figures as the definitive element of her scenes, rather than allowing the character to explain the circumstances. The subject is then able to interact freely with the space around her.

Münter worked extensively on developing this theme in her painting *Still Life with Figure II (Mrs. Simonovich)* (fig. 21). This painting challenges the boundaries that delineate a still life from a portrait. The dark room is bisected by subject matter, the sinuous woman, Mrs. Simonovich, on the right and a scattered collection of objects on a table to the left. Two *Hinterglasmalerei* hang on the wall behind the jumbled table. Here, it is crucial to note the woman's position. She plays an important role in the formation of the piece, but the space she occupies is the most notable element of the composition. It engulfs her in rich blue, and mingles with her clothing while blurring the lines between her figure and the curving table beside her, and the abstract shadows cast on the wall.

Like [the objects in the room], Mrs. Simonovich becomes an artifact, an element to be manipulated with the economy of Münter's paintings and artistic vision; she becomes transformed into a marginalized formal element, her personality suppressed within the totality of a compositional and coloristic constellation defined by and defining the artist.⁸¹

Like Münter, Matisse also utilized this artistic invention. In his 1919 painting titled *Interior at Nice* (fig. 22), Matisse created a lavish scene of indoor relaxation. A lone female figure, dressed in an ivory gown, sits in a comfortable chair next to two doors thrown wide open, coaxing in a sea breeze. The sheer curtains billow around the open doorway. From

⁸¹ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 62.

the viewer's vantage point, we can see the sparkling Mediterranean and a palm tree just beyond the balcony outside. Matisse utilizes a bold, tropical palette to embellish the scenery.

Within the interior, Matisse explores a range of rich colors and decorative patterns around a seated figure that appears to be deep in thought. The artist paints variants of this picture with differing coloristic effects.⁸²

The lush, colorful interior immediately captures attention. The eye follows the plush, crimson carpet below to the sumptuous curtains that frame the doorway above. A vase of burgundy roses has been placed on a table across from the seated woman. Matisse has placed her at the bottom left of the canvas, where she simply becomes a part of the still life that the painter has created. It is not designed to be a portrait, but rather a personal still life that highlights the space rather than the figure within it. This is similar to Münter's *The Future* and *Meditation*.

Matisse recreated this interior scene in a second painting, also called *Interior at Nice*. In this variation, a lone woman relaxes on her balcony, overlooking the sparkling Mediterranean Sea. She appears to be the same woman as shown in the previous image. Matisse constructs a similar interior arrangement. He places a chair in the bottom center of the canvas, facing the open doorway, as if the woman has recently vacated it in favor of sitting in the sunshine. A small bouquet of flowers adorns a vanity draped in a white tablecloth.

This time, Matisse notably leaves evidence of his artistic processes within this composition. The table underneath the white cloth, as well as the chair behind it, has undergone several manifestations. Matisse appears to have haphazardly painted a shadow behind the arrangement. Upon closer inspection, it is evident that Matisse actually relocated the table and chair itself to another position to better fit within the layout of the room.

⁸² Henri Matisse, *Interior at Nice* (1919), Object Label, 213, European Paintings Provenance Project, St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis, MO.

In these images, Matisse employs an important technique that Münter utilized frequently known as *Fensterbilder*, or window pictures. This method allows the artist to feature a smaller scene within a larger context. Münter employs this approach with great success in images like *The Future (Woman in Stockholm)* (fig. 7). Beyond the window lies another composition, almost in a world of its own. The French Fauvists, especially Matisse adopted this technique (Matisse's *Harmony in Red* from 1908 and *The Open Window* from 1905) (figs. 23, 24). Münter also applied this method to many of her paintings (*Breakfast with Birds*, 1934) (fig. 25).

Aside from using *Fensterbilder*, both Münter and Matisse render small paintings or drawings within the larger painting. In the second version of *Interior at Nice*, Matisse painted a miniature picture above the vanity, reflecting the scene within the room. Within this tiny image, the gestural outline of a woman sits in reverse to the woman outside. Matisse depicted the curtains in the same direction and painted a swift stroke of turquoise to resemble the large room's shutters. He even incorporated the lavish pink carpet and red wall on the left side of the room. Repeating the image in a smaller frame is a recursive technique known as the Droste effect, or *mise en abyme*. The French Impressionists, Vincent van Gogh, and the Fauves practiced this technique. Though Gabriele Münter did not typically utilize this precise method, she did often incorporate smaller images within larger ones (such as including paintings hanging on walls in still life images). She was one of the only Expressionists to use this technique.

In 1912, Münter completed a sizeable interior portrait of Kandinsky and fellow painter Erma Bossi entitled *Kandinsky and Bossi at the Table* (fig. 26). The two artists are seated across from each other at a small table in a corner of Münter's dining room. Münter creates an emphatic contrast between the dark, high wooden panels of the bench seating

around the table and the brightly colored, conversing diners. The flatness of light gives no hints as to the time of day, but perhaps the shadows in the adjacent room suggest that it is evening. Kandinsky's hand is raised in an insistent gesture as he speaks to Bossi, who is politely listening across the table. Once again, the figures seated at the table are a part of the still life that Münter has created. We cannot see Kandinsky's expression from the viewer's perspective, nor can we see Bossi's reaction to his words. The palette is reminiscent of a Fauvist one, and Münter distributes color throughout the room to highlight the seated figures. Additionally, Münter once again renders the contents of individual pictures hanging on her walls, depicting small *Hinterglasmalerei* images alongside decorative sculptural objects.

The final method that Münter utilizes to connect her style with Fauve trends is her use of curious perspectives. She does not use traditional perspective in her interior scenes, but rather alters her viewer's position so as to include objects in the natural periphery that would go unseen in a typical perspectival painting.

A perfect example of this practice may be found in Münter's 1910 painting, *Still Life: Bedroom* (fig. 27). In this canvas, Münter gives her viewer an intimate view into her own bedroom. From the viewer's perspective, we see a haphazard collection of white furniture pressed against the brilliant green walls of the room. On the left, a doorway leads to Kandinsky's bedroom, where the artist lies in bed. He does not play a vital role in the composition, but rather becomes a feature of the still life. On the right, Münter has rendered her washbasin, a bucket, a water jug, and a pair of shoes. These features of homely daily life are granted greater, artful significance simply because they are represented.

Münter radically tilts the visual plane toward her viewer, and the effect is thoroughly disorienting. This is intentional. As viewers, our perception of the space is skewed. The peripheral spaces are clearly rendered in the painting, though Münter neglects to paint a focal

point to balance our deciphering of the image. Münter broadens our limited scope, narrowed naturally by our field of vision. This is another adroit trick borrowed from the French Fauvists.

This painting bears unmistakable similarities to Vincent van Gogh's *Bedroom* paintings. Both the Fauves and Expressionists found great inspiration in the canvases of the Dutch painter. The manner in which Münter manipulates the floor to appear as if it is tilting toward the viewer resembles van Gogh's attempt at the same twisted perspectives.

Münter's style of perspectival inventiveness is found in the interior paintings of Matisse as well. In his *Interior with a Violin Case* (fig. 28), Matisse creates a similar sense of precariously tilted perspective to achieve the effect of a large space. Additionally, Matisse experiments with the proportion of the viewer. He paints the interior from the perspective that we are substantially taller than the scene itself. From our perspective as the viewer, we look down at the room, able to gaze into the enchantingly clear sky and sea beyond the open window. This gives Matisse a reason to depict the top of the window frame itself, as it is at our eye level. The floor appears to tilt downward to seem larger. Specific elements in the room, like the two chairs or the desk, seem to be markedly smaller in order to make the space appear far larger.

This is precisely what Münter does in her own painting. She skews our perceptions of the space to accommodate a larger portion of the scene within our purview. Objects of the scene that would appear in our peripheral are tilted into our scopic experience. Noting her use of spatial ambiguity is key to understanding Münter's affiliations with Fauvism. The reason this perspectival obscurity occurs is simply because Münter, like the Fauves, seldom uses a vanishing point in her work. Most of her images rely on creating shapes rather than relying on a horizon line. Though Münter implemented this traditional artistic convention in

some of her landscapes, her interior paintings, such as still lifes, and portraits of women, seldom utilize this technique. Tilting the visual plane obscures our understanding of the space, and the lack of vanishing point or utilization of a horizon line generates the impression of the “impenetrable space”.

Münter utilized this technique throughout her career. During the 1920s and 1930s, Münter’s art reiterated earlier Fauvist themes and composition. The artist continued to focus her attention on still life images of familiar objects and scenes. In 1930, Münter composed *Kater und Hut* (Tomcat and Hat) (fig. 29), which echoed her previous utilization of warped perspective. She utilized a more subdued color palette, employing rich, warm copper tones, and contrasting them with inky charcoal. Despite her use of a darker palette, Münter’s unsteady perspective hearkens back to earlier Fauve works. The composition features a black cat with brilliant green eyes as it pauses on top of a small bench. The angle of the wrought iron bench legs directly contradicts the direction of the carpet’s stripes below. The two elements make an “X” shape on the floor, once more creating a sense of spatial ambiguity. A large, bulbous vase positioned nearby holds a bowler hat, which rests atop a cane. Once again, her rendering of these objects makes little sense in the space. It seems as if the vase could easily topple over. At the top right edge of the canvas, Münter paints a framed picture, though we cannot see the image.

The cropped frame is reminiscent of Matisse’s precarious spatial structure, the decorative interior with the bulbous, Scandinavian vase and the clear flat composition of the New Objectivity.⁸³

Beyond Münter’s stylistic affiliations with the Fauves, she also accepted the movement’s motivations. Rather than facing the dangers of modern life, Fauvist images are designed to placate the viewer’s concerns and provide them a beautiful, temporary escape

⁸³ Karoline Hille, *Gabriele Münter: Die Künstlerin mit der Zauberhand* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag GmbH & Co., 2012), 172.

from the pace of modern life. Münter adopted this mentality by portraying familiar domestic scenes from modern life. This is predominantly why the still life painting is such a premier example of her Fauvist style. She chose not to confront the difficulties of the world, but rather provide shelter from it. This is perhaps the most important connection that Münter shares with the Fauves, especially Matisse.

Matisse never hoped to save lives. But he repeatedly said that he wanted to make paintings so serenely beautiful that when one came upon them, suddenly all problems would subside.⁸⁴

This is not to imply that either artist experienced preoccupation with superficiality, but rather to demonstrate how Münter pursued Fauvist ideals more frequently and consistently than Expressionist ones, which were often deliberately confrontational. Instead of composing images that investigated the conflicted human mind, delving into psychological trauma, or exploring metaphysical truths, Münter's pre-war paintings are primarily painted for aesthetic enjoyment and ultimate visually-induced repose.

Later, *die Neue Sachlichkeit* curtailed the previously jubilant color palettes and innocent use of line and form in German art, replacing the joyous subject matter with intensely objective, matter-of-fact representations of modern sensations. Münter's work, too, underwent a shift during this period, temporarily losing its carefree spirit. As I conclude my discussion in the Weimar period, it is essential continuously to consider the stylistic tightening in Münter's work. It signaled a maturation of a darker palette and contemplative subject matter. While Münter did not fully abandon her Fauvist style, she experimented with rendering her figures in gloomier tones and shadowy spaces. It is likely that these images served as a reflection of her experiences in wartime.

⁸⁴ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 33.

Gender Ambivalence and the New Modernity in the Weimar Republic

Women's artistic culture in Germany shifted dramatically in the 1920s. This chapter examines those changes Gabriele Münter experienced and the resulting impact on her creative output. I explore her navigation through new political regimes, progressive women's sociocultural roles, and alterations to German aesthetic ideals. To do this successfully, I analyze Münter's artwork from the 1920s and early years of the 1930s prior to the establishment of the Third Reich. Using her paintings and graphic work as a guide, I illustrate how Münter's visual interpretations of the new modernity are quite different from those of her artistically active cohorts. In this study, the "new modernity" is defined as the period from 1919 to 1933 in Germany, when cultural and gender norms previously considered as modern faced opposition once more by innovative men and women, especially artists. In this case, why is Münter the ideal subject illuminating such a study? The answer lies in how Münter's expressive autonomy and consistent visual investigation of women's status evoke stylistic revolutions of the era.

Münter's creative independence, in part, stemmed from her stylistic choices, driven by external influences that *she* appropriated autonomously, rather than allowing contemporary artistic ideologies to dictate an appropriate style or subject for her. Because she did not follow modern aesthetic trends, she may be regarded as an inappropriate subject in a study about changing women's roles. However, this is precisely why she is so important to my discussion. Because she was consistent, she becomes the perfect contrast to illuminate the frenetic changes around her. Münter practiced her own form of critical autonomy that other progressive women could not achieve. Many Weimar-era women were forced customarily to choose between family life and a more independent economic existence. This was not an easy choice, especially when most women faced hard social

pressures to adhere to two very different standards. Traditional women, together with society, believed that women should remain in the home. Progressive women maintained that women should pursue autonomy. Just like the heroine Nora Helmer from *A Doll's House*, many aspiring European middle class women got entangled in webs of competing demands, caught between tradition and progression. One must ask if any Weimar-era woman could freely please herself, without questioning what consequences such self-indulgence might have on her family. This is where Münter becomes a key example. She worked diligently to assert and satisfy her own aesthetic drive. She owned her own home, worked in her personal studio, and experimented with artistic styles that she alone preferred. She did not marry, she did not have children, and she did not succumb to the dictates of German domestic ideals. This exceptional level of autonomy makes Münter a critical exemplar for evaluating available female lifestyles and creative opportunities in Germany at this time.

To build this perspective on Münter, I examine Weimar Germany's development from multiple angles to give a sense of the cultural disarray facing the country after the First World War. Beginning with a brief discussion of German masculinity prior to the war, I establish a framework for discussion of Weimar gender reconstructions as it affected both men and women. I investigate the traditional attributes of German masculinity. How did the truly masculine act? How did men prove their masculinity to each other and to society? What are the defining characteristics of a resurgent, hegemonic, German masculinity? This overview will provide a counterpoint for my later discussion of Weimar feminism. From there, I summarize the final events that generated the establishment of the Weimar Republic.

I believe it is crucial to examine in general the artistic outputs in post-war Germany. To do this, I focus on the era's innovative creative pursuits, like the New Objectivity (*die*

Neue Sachlichkeit) and document how traumatized victims of war portrayed their life experiences. In order to sample such visual languages, I will seek out the works of both male and female German Expressionists. Because Münter developed her own visions to depict her personal sufferings during the war, she is an integral component in the broadening study and understanding of this movement.

After this, I will delve into an analysis of women's roles in the Weimar Republic, integrating German cultural perceptions of the "New Woman". How were perceptions of women now altered from pre-war standards? What trials did German women now face, whether "New" or traditional? How did modernity change? Is it possible to assert that the Weimar Republic produced both a "New Woman" and a "new modernity" in close conjunction? I will anchor my discussion here by developing an in-depth analysis of Münter's life and artwork during this tumultuous period.

To understand better the evolution of Weimar gender ideals and regulations, I must first review the events that precipitated the new modern era in Germany. Summarizing the war and its impact on German politics, culture, and financial structure will establish the framework for my discussion of the Weimar Republic. The First World War transformed entirely the historically stable German economy and political regime. The conflict heralded a period of detrimental internal changes, beginning with the destabilization and collapse of German Imperialism.

Before the war's outbreak, Europe became intoxicated by the idea of a heroic, short conflict. Numerous men believed they could assert their masculinity, bravery, and physical stamina in a challenging, yet short-lived war. The Kaiser promised the German military that they would be victorious, and home before the end of autumn. However, by the end of 1917, the patriotic euphoria of the "Spirit of 1914" faded. Many men returned gruesomely

wounded from warfare and deeply disillusioned by the carnage. Numerous veterans battled mental illnesses brought on by the inhumanity of modernized warfare, while others returned home physically mutilated. For both the Allied Powers and the Central Powers, exhausted soldiers endured the merciless strain of the prolonged conflict.

As 1918 approached, a lack of resources crippled the German military. Iron, coal, and oil shortages increased in 1916-1917, spilling over into the final year of war. At home, more effective Allied blockades stopped all commerce and threatened the home front with starvation. The greatest shortage was morale. Frequent defeats damaged the German war effort. The enfeebled German army could not survive more focused offensives by the Allied forces. These came down to small territorial gains and tremendous, attritional casualties that Germany could not afford. On most of the Western front, German military discipline slowly collapsed. As the Allies continued to surge through enemy lines, it became evident that German soldiers were now giving up and the nation itself was threatened. The war was no longer a straightforward progression toward victory, but now a complicated series of deadly stalemates that resulted in no quantifiable success. The war of attrition was coming to a close at horrific, unsustainable human cost.

On the homefront, innocent civilians endured increasing difficulties. Facing starvation, those left behind were forced to subsist on diseased meats (including horseflesh), rotten vegetables and spoiled dairy products. Pre-war domestic standards of living also collapsed. The distressed words of one housewife in Austria capture the brutality of hunger and the wounds of war on the homefront:

We housewives have during the last four years grown accustomed to standing in queues; we have grown accustomed to being informed after hours of waiting that the supplies are exhausted and that we can try again in a week's time with the pink card, section No. so-and-so; in the meantime we

are obliged to go home with empty hands and still emptier stomachs. These disappointments are the order of the day.⁸⁵

Restive, rebellious civilian populations gained strength when the now desperate German military high command proposed a suicidal “death-ride” final sortie of the German High Seas Fleet against the invincible Royal Navy. Military mutinies and desertions dramatically increased, further destabilizing the political mood among the German populous. Old German domestic conflicts resurfaced and spontaneous uprisings erupted in numerous German cities. Small groups of revolutionaries, such as the leftist Spartacists or International Group, fought aggressively against any continuation of the war. They used slogans like, “Down with the war!” to rally additional support among disaffected soldiers and citizens.

Exhausted by the war efforts and outraged by the government prevarications, ordinary workers and their families demanded peace and popular control of local food supplies and services. These groups staged radical civilian uprisings closely resembling the victorious Russian Soviet protests of 1919. While the true scope and threat of this popular political uprising remain contested, its rapid expansion and vast scale certainly triggered deeper anxieties among much of the population. Ruth Henig asserts: “Many nationalists, even those pressing for constitutional reforms, were alarmed by what they perceived as ‘Russian solutions’ being put forward for German problems and consequently sought to challenge and to undermine the authority of the councils.”⁸⁶ Germany’s already unstable political circumstances grew more agitated and unpredictable.

⁸⁵ Anna Eisenmenger, *Blockade: The Diary of an Austrian Middle Class Woman, 1914-1924* (New York: Ray Long and Richard R. Smith, 1932), 62-69, quoted in Marilyn Shevin-Coetzee and Frans Coetzee, *World War I: A History in Documents* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 121.

⁸⁶ Ruth Henig, *The Weimar Republic 1919-1933* (New York: Routledge, 1998), 9.

In the final days of war, Germany crumbled from within. As discontent spread, thousands wondered if the costs in food, comfort, and human life were in any way worth the tremendous war effort on the German side. A devastating seven million became casualties of the eleven million German men conscripted. In only five years of attrition, Germany's economic prowess, military power, and imperial prestige evaporated. For Germans, the infamous "Black Day" of the war, the Armistice of November 11th, 1918, signaled the end of all Imperial conventions and threatened to destroy Germany itself.

After the war, political negotiations for the "peace" began between the victorious Allied Powers and exhausted Germany. The Treaty of Versailles (1918-1919) ruled against Germany, saddling the defeated country with the huge economic burden of war reparations soon to become cataclysmic. Article 231 of the Versailles Treaty, the infamous 'war guilt' clause, determined that Germany should be held financially responsible for all damages inflicted on its wartime enemies. Germany must then pay a sum of 132 billion marks to compensate 'for causing all the loss and damage to which the Allies and Associated Governments and their nationals have been subjected as a consequence of the war imposed upon them by the aggression of Germany and her allies.' Under the subsequent Dawes and Young Plans, Germany agreed to pay these reparations at a tremendous cost to its own weakened people and economy.

When the Weimar Republic was declared on 8 November, 1918, Germans were deeply apprehensive. The new government formed only days before the humiliating armistice had been signed. Kaiser Wilhelm II abdicated on 9 November, thus obliterating a final personal connection to an Imperial state. The new government severed itself from Imperialism completely. The Republic represented a genuine attempt by democratic forces

to create a true, lasting constitutional state. However, many of the German right doubted the state's legitimacy and survivability.

As tensions increased, a third phase of the post-war German revolution began. The far left socialists, deeply inspired by Marxism, seized an opportunity to overthrow capitalism and establish a workers' state once and for all. Embittered by the war and distrusting political elites that had dragged Germany into the disastrous conflict, socialist revolutionaries organized violent protests that raged amidst German cities.

By January 1919, the German Communist Party developed a reputation for uncompromising political violence and brinkmanship. This dubious repute even permeated German visual media. The satirical magazine *Simplicissimus* featured a disquieting cartoon in its March 1925 issue, paying tribute to the Rhineland city of Dortmund. The city suffered immense material, human, and moral losses in the early twenties from armed Communist and Spartacist uprisings. Titled "Die Toten von Dortmund", a skeletal mother and young child, dressed in black, gaze wearily down at the closed casket of a dead loved one. Their eyes are empty, blank sockets, and thick lines crease their pale faces. Rows of caskets line the earth, and a group of emaciated mourners stand sentinel by the corpses. Silent and solemn headstones fill the cemetery of the mourned. The irony of this illustration is the implication that war-time fighting never truly ceased in Germany. Even once the war ended, smaller disputes continued to ravage the country. Many, not just on the political right, saw the effects of this radical extremism as entirely threatening recovery of German society.

In addition to post-war reparation payments, the country battled preexisting economic strife. By 1921, domestic economic conditions had severely deteriorated. To fund the war effort, German leaders chose to borrow massive sums of money, confident that a German victory would provide the confiscated means to repay these loans. Massive

monetary inflation now struck a deeply indebted Germany. By 1918, the German mark had lost approximately three-quarters of its 1913 value. Wholesale prices increased by 306 percent in spring of 1921. By summer of 1921, prices had jumped 415 percent. By the fall, the annual rate of inflation had climbed to 1,288 percent, destroying the economic security of most Germans.⁸⁷

In spite of the Germany's war losses and the subsequent demoralizing economic destabilization, the foundation of a parliamentary democracy sparked the development of a new, more tolerant and innovative German culture. Because of this, the Weimar Republic is often taken to be synonymous with "modernity". In my opinion, the two are separate entities. The Republic and the freedoms it offered acted as a platform upon which modernity could thrive. However, the simultaneous developments of the Weimar Republic and manifestations of a new modernity have sparked decades of sharpening academic debate. Scholarly opinions on the development of "modernity" during the Weimar Republic often split into two main arguments. First, there is the belief that the Republic only enabled pre-existing cultural urges, especially for women, to take shape under the new government. Second, there is the claim that the Republic birthed entirely new and unprecedented trends emerging from the immediate needs of a wounded German nation and culture.

Historian and author Peter Gay asserts the first side of the argument vigorously. He states, "The [Weimar] Republic created nothing. It liberated what was already there."⁸⁸ While it is true that historians have found precursors to Weimar feminism in pre-war Germany, it is too simple to assert that the Weimar Republic only liberated what already

⁸⁷ Giuseppe Tullio, "Inflation and Currency Depreciation in Germany, 1920-1923: A Dynamic Model of Prices and the Exchange Rate," *Journal of Money, Credit and Banking* 27, no. 2 (May 1995), 350-362, accessed May 5, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2077872>.

⁸⁸ Peter Gay, *Weimar Culture: the Outsiders as Insiders* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1968), quoted in John Willett, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period: The New Sobriety 1917-1933* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1996), 12.

existed. The opposing side of this debate, expressed by John Willett, asserts a highly innovative Weimar regime capable of generating new cultural and political responses to pressing, immediate, and novel social needs.

For the younger generation's approach to the arts was at once less individualistic and more down to earth: while understanding the advances made by the pioneers...they tested and applied them in a fresh way, seeing how they related to the needs and shortcomings of post-war society and to the new technical devices and channels of communication even then being evolved. It was these people who did not so much liberate the modern movement as shift it to a new, much wider and less personal plane where for the first time it could affect the lives of whole communities, not just small cultural elites.⁸⁹

I believe that Willett's formulation is a far more accurate, convincing statement especially relevant to Gabriele Münter's life and work. Pre-war "modernity" got forgotten as it no longer cohered with the traumatized current state of life. New efforts were essential to revitalize a starved and badly broken country. The creation of a "new modernity" became imperative. In the case of Gabriele Münter, the "new modernity" caused her to search for a new, avant-garde style in order to remain relevant in the fluctuating art scene.

The Weimar Republic was an era of severe political instability and fluctuations. The institution of an entirely new political system stoked anxieties in post-war Germany. The Republic confronted significant obstacles shortly after its creation. Manifest dissent, factional rebellions, and politically inspired murders now afflicted German metropolises. Dissatisfaction with all government frequently triggered these events. In fact, many Germans did not accept the legitimacy of the new political system at all. Restive German nationalists saw the new government as an economic death sentence for their country. Popular perceptions grew that the current political regime had little to no effective authority.

⁸⁹ Willett, *Art and Politics in the Weimar Period*, 12.

Despite these threatening, retrograde incidents, Weimar Germans still pursued cultural tolerance and innovation. The German film industry entered a new era of unprecedented technological inventions and spectacular cinematic artistry. Architects, interior designers, and industrial designers with strongly pro-social sympathies coalesced in the German Bauhaus collective. German authors and visual artists now advanced the concept of the “New Woman”, reconsiderations of female lives and opportunities appropriate for a new German nation determined to surmount its post-war traumas.

It is thus safe to say that Germany experienced an identity crisis after losing the First World War. How could the German nation and its citizens overcome military defeat and the moral opprobrium that accompanied it? This dilemma energized the era. The war also severely damaged traditional German concepts of masculinity and femininity. Older conceptions of gender roles that had informed German imperial culture now collapsed. One of the most distinctive elements in this chapter of German history is that both men and women reinterpreted and redefined masculinity and femininity based upon their war-time experiences. To analyze such sweeping identity crises, I must first briefly explore the pre-war conceptions of masculinity in Germany. How was masculinity defined and exhibited before the war?

Prior to the First World War, Europe’s first, true exposure to modern, industrialized warfare, participating in combat was considered to be a noble way of cultivating heroic masculinity. Combat-ready, patriotic men became the best embodiment of German nationality. Therefore, their gender identity became regimented through military service. This had been particularly evident during the Prussian uprisings against Napoleonic rule in 1813. “Voluntary military service and ‘patriotic charity’ for ‘national warriors’ and their families were the two most visible forms of a patriotic national commitment previously

unheard of in German history, at least on the scale of 1813-15.”⁹⁰ This was a unifying, patriotic movement that relied upon and bolstered conceptions of male valor. This patriotism fueled the development of the German nationality, and ideology thriving throughout the nineteenth century and culminating in “The Spirit of 1914”. This phrase refers to the pro-war attitude held by the majority of European society in 1914. Germans especially accepted and supported enthusiastically the idea of a European war in the summer just before the conflict began.

The formula for measuring German masculinity now became simplified. The hegemonic ideal of the masculine warrior was strengthened by the idea of war as an arena where virility could be tested, verified, and displayed. Manly German militarists now perceived the luxury of peacetime as a weakening mechanism, ruinous to real manhood. Men proved their worth on the battlefield, in actual combat. Sweat and blood measured a man’s masculinity, as did his willingness to sacrifice his life for his country, his leader, and his family. Martial masculinity, the truest masculinity of all, became inherently unifying via its ability to level socio-economic distinctions. A corollary gender equilibrium could be maintained as long as men defended their country and women guarded the home. This German domestic and gendered ideology persisted until after the First World War.

Masculinity and comradeship got closely linked as joint proof of virility. According to this German tradition, the ideal of manliness meant “the practice of self-control, steeling the body in order to be best at sports and games, to be chivalrous toward girls while refusing to squander one’s sexuality – the greatest gift nature can bestow upon a man in the prime of

⁹⁰ Karen Hagemann, “Of ‘Manly Valor’ and ‘German Honor’: Nation, War, and Masculinity in the Age of the Prussian Uprising against Napoleon,” *Central European History* 30, no. 2 (1997): 187.

life.”⁹¹ In accord with these gender strictures, a man was expected to be a friend on the frontlines and maintain responsible connections to his home while on leave. The popular image of the “good comrade” circulated as the epitome of true masculinity. This soldier was loyal to his family, especially his wife or girlfriend at home, was self-controlled, and dedicated to protecting his country at all costs. He was courageous and most importantly, monogamously heterosexual.

The war worked in clearly defining “good comrades” and loyal women on the home front versus degenerate “types”. Men and women were imagined to be locked in a symbiotic, spiritually sustaining relationship, bound by mutual loyalty and dedication to the fatherland.⁹² This sort of martial masculinity epitomized a man’s national identity. His participation in military endeavors was essential to his proven virility, while a woman’s dedication to preserving the sanctity of the home and its domesticity became the essence of her femininity.

These complementary and rigid gender roles enabled the social stratifications that characterized pre-war Imperial German culture. For men and women, deviating from these roles was considered ruinous for one’s reputation and indicative of the degradation of the gender hierarchy.

As I demonstrated previously, unambiguous domestic standards for women dictated their social roles. Women’s stalwart defense of the home acted as a counterpoint to men’s heroic accomplishments outside the home. However, Imperial German female identity foundered at the end of the First World War. More women now considered Weimar femininity the result of autonomous achievements, like earning an income and pursuing

⁹¹ George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, Inc., 1985), 46.

⁹² Jason Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front: Masculinity, Sexuality and German Soldiers in the First World War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014), 15.

leisure time activities outside the claustrophobic domestic sphere. However, this attitude was deeply problematic for men, especially those returning from war. The sudden creation of a new, more democratic governmental system, the emergence of the “New Woman”, and the ambient severe economic turmoil, resulted in “a crisis of traditional male authority, agency, and identity.”⁹³ There can be no doubt that Weimar reconstructions of both German masculinity and femininity are interconnected. Some men, especially in cities, believed that they must redefine their own gender ideals to better counteract the burgeoning new femininity in Weimar. They hoped this would allow them to retain some self-gratifying and self-aggrandizing authority over their womenfolk.

Influenced by this perceived weakening of German men’s culture, as well as radical political extremism, German artists created a new aesthetic style known as the New Objectivity, or *neue Sachlichkeit*. This movement encouraged visual depictions of common reality combined with artfully engaged political activity, like the Dortmund example. With the First World War as its impetus, *neue Sachlichkeit* gave artists license to illustrate objectively the appalling trauma of war. The *neue Sachlichkeit* style focused primarily on rendering life in starkly unsentimental ways. Artists often utilized a muted palette and illustrated scenes in a satirical or cynical caricatured manner. Haunting images of menaced cities, violent sexual acts, flashbacks to war crimes, and portraits of mutilated vagrants now symbolized an ugly tumultuous era in German history.

The hope was to master chaos, anxiety, and the specific social and economic problems plaguing intellectuals and artists—all of which tended to get subsumed under the supposed threat of women and the fear of male impotence and “feminization”. Mastery would be regained by documenting the anxieties of modernity, “objectively” and “soberly” with the help of modern technology and/or “scientific” methods.⁹⁴

⁹³ Richard W. McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity: Film, Literature, and “New Objectivity”* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 3.

⁹⁴ Richard W. McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity*, 51.

How could womanhood and femininity pose a greater threat to Germany than the four-year war it had just endured? In my opinion, masculine fears of female emancipation resulted from the collapse traditional women's domestic roles during the war. Men wanted to reconstruct the past which glorified virility and enforced women's roles based on perceived biological constraints. Conversely, women endeavored to segue their wartime positions in the workforce into full-time, post-war employment. This economic opportunity would allow them to become more visible, legitimate full participants in the marketplace. The tension between men's nostalgic desire to recreate historical gender codes and women's motivation to break free from traditional restraints of their liberties led to intense debate. In order to restore order and regain mastery of their anxieties, male New Objectivity artists confessed their apprehension by reacting visually to modernity.

This is primarily why pre-war and post-war German Expressionisms are entirely different. Pre-war Expressionism captured the spiritual contemplations of the artists. These Expressionists disassociated their work from all outdated artistic canons. In the years leading up to 1914, French and German aesthetic advancements were made in an atmosphere of jovial, competitive, and free experimentation. This period of reciprocal influence led to an explosion of aesthetic innovation. Post-war Expressionists investigated and recreated the traumatic events they experienced during the conflict. Additionally, these artists concentrated on depicting the unsentimental realities of post-war German life. The war bisected Expressionism and its styles.

Before the First World War, Expressionism was a private, aesthetic revolution, if not a self-centered one. The artists' central quest was for qualities of form and color that were neutral and autonomous. However, whenever these two elements were used consciously and purposefully, they reflected mainly the mood and private state of mind of the individual painter himself. The painters of the city, on the other hand, did not begin to develop their own artistic standards until they had gone through the war, and instead

of painting people as individuals, they saw man more as a social creature and a victim of political intrigue.⁹⁵

More than any other influence, the human effects of the First World War gave German Expressionism a new identity. Veterans lamented their brutalizing experiences in the military with visual representations of horrific combat. Expressionists like Otto Dix (1891-1969) and George Grosz (1893-1953) illustrated the conflict in a way that does not glorify the battle or extol masculine heroism. Their images picture the terror that soldiers experienced as their sanity and gender identities became unhinged and uprooted.

As surviving soldier-artists returned from the front, a difficult question emerged: how can an artist portray his almost inexpressibly horrifying battlefield experience in any visual medium? The French Surrealists, German Expressionists, and German Dadaists developed answers to this existential challenge.

The Surrealists believed that loosening all restraints on the unconscious mind might heal mental traumas caused by the war. By 1922, the Surrealists actively practiced stream-of-consciousness poetry. In 1924, André Breton founded the official Surrealist movement in France. In the Surrealist Manifesto (1924), Breton describes Surrealism as

Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express – verbally, by means of the written word, or in any other manner – the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by the thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern.⁹⁶

The Surrealists refused any restrained palette, as adhering to artistic traditional principles meant little to their more profound internal investigations. Carefully eliminating all “rational” depictions of their experiences from their work, the French Surrealists allowed their art to articulate their pain and fear in new, uncontrolled ways, unfettered by

⁹⁵ Dietmar Elger, *Expressionism* (Köln, Germany: Taschen Publishers, 1998), 204.

⁹⁶ David Bate, *Photography and Surrealism: Sexuality, Colonialism and Social Dissent* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2004), 54.

considerations of antique aesthetics. The depictions of personal interpretations of terrible events may have little to do with the trauma itself. Some Surrealists chose to focus on unrelated subject matter as a means of distancing themselves from acute physical and psychological damage. Post-war Surrealist art hesitated to demonstrate the objective effects of war as a way of coming to terms with it.

Surrealists' ultimate goal focused on unlocking the subconscious mind and living freely and instinctively, detached from "reasoned" existence. Their thoughts liberated latent impulses, rather than vague sentiments of superficial emotions. Surrealists and others who ascribed to these modern ideologies believed in making vital distinctions between the human thought process and the human experience of deeper subliminal desires. This enabled artists to confront and overcome traumatic experiences subconsciously and impulsively, without any hesitancy or self-censorship imposed by outdated aesthetic standards or conventions.

The German Dadaists took a similar approach. Stylistically, Dadaism has little to do with creating aesthetically pleasing compositions for viewers. Instead, the movement concentrated on exposing artists' inner motivations and the role of a previously unacknowledged subconscious in fomenting innovative artistic expression. Dadaism also promoted exposure of contemporary anxieties and personal traumas with blatant disregard for social and artistic conventions. The mindset resulted in provocative use of the "readymade object", or common artifact of daily life, elevated to be considered artistic or subversively symbolic in nature. Marcel Duchamp's iconic *Fountain* from 1917, an upturned urinal, is an ideal example of this irreverent and satirical tradition.

Manifest human traumas played a crucial role in the creation of the Dada movement. The language used by the Dadaists to describe their craft exemplifies their intention to apply

terms of traumatization and horror to defend their values. In the 1918 “Dadaist Manifesto”, a famous passage describes the ambitions of the movement.

The highest art will be that which in its conscious content presents the thousandfold problems of the day, an art which one can see has let itself be thrown by the explosions of the last week, which is forever gathering up its limbs after yesterday’s crash. The best and most extraordinary artists will be those who every hour snatch the tatters of their bodies out of the frenzied cataract of life, holding fast to the intellect of their time, bleeding from hands and hearts.⁹⁷

The real question that Dadaism thrust to the forefront of artistic innovation became: what artistic motivation most deeply and truly drives the creative process? Additionally, what is the role of the artist in the artistic process at a time when struggle or war never ends? These foundational questions regarding Dadaism relate directly to my discussion of artistic renderings of traumatic experiences. How do victims of war process trauma internally? How do these internal, definitive anxieties manifest themselves on external surfaces, like an artist’s canvas, sketchbook, or sculpture? What do these renderings of trauma reveal about male and female sufferings and interactions during and after the First World War?

Energized by French Surrealists and German Dadaists, post-war German Expressionist artists utilized their artwork to self-diagnose and mend the personal, psychological wounds caused by the First World War. They sought to confront their experiences of war artfully. Post-war Expressionists seldom painted or drew peripheral or merely decorative subject matter, as many believed it would eclipse the memory of the war for those who experienced its full horrors, and thus misrepresent it to those who avoided the draft. Left bitter from the conflict, post-war Expressionists, now frequently referred to as the “New Objectivity artists”, violently communicated their disdain for everyone who had

⁹⁷ Brigid Doherty, “‘See: ‘We Are All Neurasthenics!’ or, the Trauma of Dada Montage,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 1 (Autumn 1997), pp. 82-132, accessed January 7, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1344160>.

helped fuel the war effort. They complained in art, private letters, and more widely circulated publications. Their visualizations, while challenging for audiences, provide insight into German soldiers' minds at the front and at home.

The content of New Objectivity art focused primarily on depicting two major components: the First World War and its brutal effects on the human mind and body, and post-war German culture, including political upheavals and societal disintegration. Artist and former soldier Otto Dix related his personal combat experiences in a disquieting 1924 series known as *Der Krieg* (The War). The images in this series illustrate some of the most gruesome incidents in the trenches. In his images, Dix depicted shrapnel raining on the trenches, striking the living and the dead. Shell-shocked soldiers desperately seek shelter. In his most famous image from the series, *Stormtroopers Advance Under Gas* (1924) (fig. 30), lethal gas spreads over the earth and ghostly soldiers don their bizarre masks. These soldiers are not depicted as individual heroic men, but rather as anonymous figures fleeing in a jumbled crowd.

Rather than depicting soldiers' experiences of war, George Grosz vented his own spleen in paintings of physically mutilated veterans after the conflict had ceased. His images depict an immoral civilian wasteland of murderous encounters between veterans and prostitutes. Here, fallen, disfigured beggars desperately seek alms from indifferent, uncaring pedestrians. Such Expressionist artists inventory and depict the human offal of mechanized, heartless, pointless war. Once aspiring national male heroes of industrialized bloody combat, these mutilated survivors now find themselves unceremoniously pushed to the margins of society. Thus German post-war identity crises festered.

The visual semiotics of trauma, or motifs that symbolized or represented the terrors of war, differed for male and female Expressionist artists. Male artists created a visual

language that concentrated on blatant portrayals of suffering and brute pain in physical combat. They did so while scrupulously showing what real war really looked like. Women artists, like Gabriele Münter and the graphic artist Käthe Kollwitz (1867-1945), more often interpreted the subtler struggles women faced on the homefront. Their images frequently fixate on the deeply personal and emotional torment women actually experienced, such as loneliness and inexpressible loss. Additionally, women artists concentrated on representing themes of female sacrifice. This ideology of stoical deprivation permeates wartime German femininity. It is communicated in the work of women wartime artists, and in prevailing Socialist ideologies to which many German women ascribed. Women figured prominently into the German Socialist movement, in large part because it supported women's emancipation. Stressing the complete and emotive equality of the female sex, the women's Socialist movement gave German femininity new dimensions, and undoubtedly promoted the New Woman's emergence objectively after the war.

In much German women's art, the primary symbol of trauma is the lone female. Feminine isolation is significant because it indicates the loss of family attachments. Because the massive war effort required so many men, most women experienced the frequent departures of husbands, sons, fathers, and uncles. We see this repeated motif in the works of Münter and Kollwitz. However, society still revered and imposed expectations of women's selflessness. The will to sacrifice one's life in combat historically was the most glorious endeavor a man could perform. German Socialist leader Clara Zetkin (1857-1933) urged women to embrace the concept that they must accept a man's dutiful sacrifices in wartime. In turn, women made a reciprocal, ennobling sacrifice by willingly permitting their men to go to war. Altruistic death for the greater good of later generations epitomized pre-war German masculinity. Mounting wartime troop losses intensified demands on (and for)

the inner strength of women, casting them as the selfless heroines amongst external tragedies of war.

We [women] are endowed with the strength to make sacrifices which are more painful than the giving of our own blood. Consequently, we are able to see our own [men] fight and die when it is for the sake of freedom.⁹⁸

During the war, Gabriele Münter developed her own provocative visual language of loss and loneliness, projecting and questioning these ideas of feminine sacrifice in her dark, moody pictures of isolated women in interior spaces (*The Future* and *Meditation*). She failed to outrun the war's terrible impacts. These highly symbolic portraits of single women may also partially represent the wives of deceased soldiers, trapped in their now empty homes. Her fellow *Blauer Reiter* artists, Franz Marc and August Macke, both perished in the war, leaving behind grieving families and friends. Her wartime isolation, separation from Kandinsky and her home in Murnau, and the loss of the comfortable familiarity of Munich, motivated her creation of these emotional, symbolic portraits of lone women.

Such symbols are important to consider as I move forward in my discussion of Weimar femininity and women's creative output that characterized the mood of the surviving generation in 1933. Münter continued to paint lone women in private spaces as a gesture toward her past and experiences during the war. However, these images may also symbolize the New Woman in post-war German society and the unique modern challenges that she now faced as private and public witness to Germany's actual miseries.

As a whole, German culture experienced a marked shift in mood from 1917 through the early 1930s. This change is also known as the "New Sobriety", a term coined by art

⁹⁸ Angela Moorjani, "Käthe Kollwitz on Sacrifice, Mourning, and Reparation: An Essay in Psychoaesthetics," *MLN* 101, no. 5 (December 1986), 1110-1134, accessed January 8, 2016, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2905713>.

historian Gustav Friedrich Hartlaub.⁹⁹ The term is provocative because it implies prior license or even inebriation. It can summarize and reproach attitudes and conventions visible in the joyful pre-war summer months of 1914. As the bloody war wound down, Germans reassessed the severity and the manifold dangers of their situation. By 1917, anti-Imperialist sentiments sapped the old political system. The Kaiser failed to give the Germans the war victory he repeatedly promised. Then the defeated country's impoverished economy rapidly disintegrated. With no hopes left to distract them, politically aware German people now had to face the dismal reality of impending military defeat and state dismemberment.

The term "New Sobriety" refers to the artistic movements of the time as well. As I have observed, the New Objectivity artists contradicted visually the wilder Expressionists of the pre-war generation. Vivid colors and spiritualized subject matter no longer motivated creative endeavors. The earlier styles of Kandinsky, Marc, Münter, and Jawlensky, which were so popular in the early 1900s, lost influence by 1917. Critics denounced their works as superficial and distracting from present and pressing realities.

Not everyone thrived during the era of the New Sobriety. Despite growing opportunity for emancipation, German women, especially those who had been nurses during the First World War, were vilified by artists like Dix and Grosz. These artists and men like them blamed the nursing corps for precipitously returning men to the frontlines and, ultimately, to their deaths. Author Eric Dorn Brose in *The Great War* (2010) captures these animosities in his text, citing the German artist George Grosz to illustrate the extent of men's animus.

Where have the nights gone? Where are the women? Where are the adventures? [We] have been mutilated, dispersed, duped, bewitched and turned into gray-uniformed butcher's boys!! What a finale to this hell, to this

⁹⁹ Bernadette Kester, *Film Front Weimar: Representations of the First World War in German Films of the Weimar Period, 1919-1933* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2003), 89.

brutal murdering on all sides, to this witch's Sabbath, to this horrifying castration.¹⁰⁰

Grosz uses gender-specific imagery to convey his belief that women willingly sacrificed their men to the war machine betraying more intimate and restorative spousal trusts. As I have shown in my earlier discussion of the semiotics of trauma, this was not the case for women. Women made reluctant, painful sacrifices with the consideration that their actions would benefit future generations. However, Grosz does not acknowledge this. In his opinion, women's submissive behavior resulted in men's pointless, emasculating demise. In an effort to demonize women's contributions to the war effort, Grosz employs chilling language. 'Witch's Sabbath' and 'horrifying castration' are not incidental terms. The religious concept of the Sabbath is robbed of its spiritual affiliations when paired with feminized witches. Grosz claims his male genitalia, perhaps symbolizing his masculinity, has been mutilated by the actions of complacent women in wartime. The general spirit of his antagonism persisted in post-war male society: while women rested, men suffered.

In addition to their traditional roles as mothers and wives, women of wartime Germany augmented their responsibility as "life-givers" to include nursing. However, wounded and angry soldiers contested that nurses too quickly sacrificed repaired men to the war machine. Because of these accusations, women ended up playing a dichotomous role, both as "life-giver" to "life-taker". This resulted in terrible hatred. Nurturing women, both at home and in war hospitals, received increasingly hostile treatment from men. Many veterans perceived that women treated soldiers' wounds for the sole purpose of placing them back on the battlefield. Once the men returned, recently wounded and still very frightened, they were more likely to die as the conflict continued. The way soldiers saw it, women were murderers and the statistics could prove it. In the German armies alone,

¹⁰⁰ Eric Dorn Brose, *A History of the Great War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 152.

approximately two-thirds of all wounded soldiers were returned to the fight. Many of those perished shortly after their return to the frontlines.

The increasingly chaotic political situation in Germany produced a deadly complication, particularly for women. In 1917 and 1918, when veterans began sporadically returning from the front, the government focused its attention on more logistics and strategies to win battles, rather than on rehabilitating men for normal civilian life. Because of this, a proper, thorough disarmament never occurred, even in post-war German society. This left thousands of shell-shocked, resentful veterans in possession of their weapons. Without warning, these men began to perform acts on women known as *Lustmord*, or sexually motivated killings. The New Objectivity artists captured these events in large, shocking paintings of female rape and murder. The terrible enmity that some German men felt for women spiraled out of control. This focused male hatred intensified with the rise of the New Woman. The New Woman motivated men to reestablish hastily their masculinity through unsentimental images and technological advancements.

Women—especially “new” ones—were seen primarily as an obstacle to public rationality. In New Objectivity there is an obvious gesture of disavowal of the underlying anxieties about gender and modernity, an attempt to re-achieve “masculine” mastery through objectivity, science, and technology.¹⁰¹

After the hasty foundation of the Weimar Republic, these events continued. A more somber and introspective cultural environment caused many Germans to feel unsteady, including Münter herself. After her self-imposed exile in Scandinavia (1914-1920), Münter made the decision to return to her homeland. She arrived in Germany once more in 1920. Her financial situation was again dire. In order to make money, she offered art lessons to female art students using her name and reputation to bolster her credibility. However, she

¹⁰¹ McCormick, *Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Modernity*, 51.

began to feel the strains of her absence from German culture during the war as she attempted to matriculate back into German artistic society. In a brief biographical statement, Münter wrote, “Because of my absence from Germany, my work has been forgotten and only slowly am I able to regain a foothold.”¹⁰²

Germany had changed drastically. Imperialism had collapsed. German Expressionism had ceased to exist. August Macke and Franz Marc died in battle. Kandinsky fled and hid himself away in Moscow, breaking forever communication with Münter. The vindictive Versailles Peace Treaty ending The First World War saddled Germany with crushing, unmanageable war reparations bill further destabilizing economically and socially the shell-shocked Weimar Republic. Galleries in Germany held new artwork that championed innovative artistic techniques, and declared colorful, exuberant Expressionism a woefully outdated, self-indulgent style. In northern Germany, Dada artists, like Hannah Höch, maintained that art itself was dead, a casualty of the industrial bloodletting crisis. In this tumultuous new environment, Münter faced profound personal and artistic challenges. Now working alone, Münter was vulnerable to ridicule especially by male advocating of a new, more sober objectivity fully at odds with Münter’s prior Fauvist enthusiasms. While Weimar was noticeably more liberated than the Imperial Germany Münter had left behind, a variety of new threats confronted her aesthetically and emotionally. In order to assimilate herself into Weimar society more thoroughly and safely, Münter aligned herself with exhibitions of women’s art. By the summer of 1920, she had returned to quieter, provincial Murnau. She also established a connection with the Munich New Secession. Through the early 1920s, Münter continued to exhibit her work with the

¹⁰² Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 173.

Munich New Secession, gaining progressive access to many of Munich's most renowned gallery and museum spaces.

Women's culture in Germany had also changed tremendously during Münter's absence. In the newly chaotic and unconventional political environment, and despite male animosities, it seems implausible that the Weimar Republic could have created and facilitated the growth of a burgeoning new culture of women. Paradoxically, in the wake of poverty, hyperinflation, massive starvation, political discontent and uprisings, violence, and disease, the years 1924 through 1928 proved to be productive, even financially fruitful for Münter and some other experimental female German artists. At last, Germany achieved greater economic stability, reached an agreement regarding reparations, and recovered core industrial production sites. While underlying tensions remained evident, political, economic, social and cultural developments propelled modernization in new directions. Perhaps the most notable of these modern innovations was Weimar feminism.

Weimar feminism, like many branches of feminism throughout world history, had two major characteristics. First, it was a middle-class movement that targeted financially stable individuals from decent bourgeois stock. Second, it required a liberal, highly-individualistic mindset that tolerated very little interference from the State. It was a modern endeavor. In Germany, the League of German Women's Associations (*Bund Deutsche Frauenvereine* or BDF) challenged the old status dependencies and conventions for women. The organization's aim was "to gather women in a spirit of unified constructive work (and) with a faith in the strength of our people to rise again."¹⁰³ The BDF fought vehemently to reshape the boundaries of Imperial German femininity that continued its lasting attempt to dictate women's participation in domesticity and maternal duties or as care-givers to men

¹⁰³ Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933* (Beverly Hills: SAGE Publications, Inc., 1976), 235.

dead or alive. The war liberated women from the home and released them into factories where they became wage earners. In 1919, German women won their own battle for suffrage. Slowly, the German feminist movement made more progress. The Weimar period ultimately was an era of dissonance between traditional modes and gender norms of German Imperialism and more modern approaches to social organization. Unfortunately, persistent internal tensions and disagreements over priorities undermined the German feminist movement. Münter saw this happen.

An important facet of Weimar culture to analyze at this juncture is the reinvention of the meaning of “modernism”. There were a variety of “modernisms” in twentieth-century Germany, but one of the most critical was that of modernism for women. Modernism for women meant that a woman could circumvent the expectations that she would be a wife and mother as her primary role and instead pursue a career, economical stability, and non-marital relationships. Previously, feminine modernity remained confined to a woman’s choice (or supposed biological role) to be a housewife and raise her children. She was purely objectified as a mother and wife. Young women were encouraged to follow their mother’s lead in this endeavor. Younger women got socialized to be comfortable in this maternal role. Domestic pursuits formed nineteenth-century conceptions of “feminine modernity”.

The Weimar Republic, especially in metropolitan areas, witnessed a pronounced shift in the meaning of modernity as it applied to women. This new development championed women’s growing desire to make an income beyond the bounds of their households. Even more scandalously for conservatives, this meant that women might self-indulgently employ money to purchase consumer goods for themselves. For most women, the desire to earn money originally stemmed from a hope to supplement their family’s income. However, later, this ambition became amplified by an aspiration to become participants engaged in

urban economics of conspicuous consumption. Single women were some of the first to achieve such financial autonomy. They created an enviable model for those who were married and had children. Those who still held fast to the conventions of the domesticated woman frequently touted this craze as corrosive to more stable bourgeois society. However, nightlife and entertainment were more alluring than traditions.

The golden glitter of consumer articles triumphed, and the new method of installment purchasing allowed some dreams to come true more quickly than before. Revues and bars tempted with their neon colors. With the loss of family ties, consumption and cultural diversion gained a higher level of acceptance than before, and the expanding consumer products and entertainment industries were surrogates for empty personal relationships.¹⁰⁴

Berlin modernized rapidly after the war. Its recovering service and culture economy needed young, talented men and women to prosper. Women gained employment in a variety of professions now, including banking, transportation management, decorative arts, and industrial design.

Despite a growing level of emancipation, women, even “New Women”, effortless and cool, remained frustrated still often by their reliance on male superiors at home and in the workplace. Many German women grew preoccupied with fears of being terminated from their jobs often acquired exceptionally in wartime. These major concerns for employed women complicated and overshadowed their pursuit of greater expressive freedom. Tangible limitations on female employment showed that women were still subject to patriarchal control and the whims of male bosses. Some women could briefly escape this situation on Saturday evenings, when they could enjoy a few consumer pleasures of the leisure “weekend”. During this one evening, women could dress as they pleased, behave in a way they deemed appropriate, and enjoy a night of drinking and smoking with friends and acquaintances.

¹⁰⁴ Von Ankum, *Women in the Metropolis*, 91.

In the 1920s, strict borderlines between housework and the morally questionable public sphere became blurred. With the enormous rise in the numbers of young working women in offices and stores, sexual harassment increased enormously; at the same time, it became socially more acceptable for women to work or visit bars and dance halls alone.¹⁰⁵

Women also utilized their familiarity with technology to resist resurgent, right-wing traditions. Because women had often held exclusive access to household technology, like ovens and stovetops, they gained confidence with using machinery in their daily lives. This was intimidating to some German men, because it seemed to give women a distinct advantage in the workplace. This phenomenon was not limited to the business sphere. In fact, artists like Hannah Höch epitomized this type of woman. Familiar with technology, Höch was able to incorporate its components into her art seamlessly. *Cut with a Kitchen Knife* (1919) (fig. 31) became an archetypal example of modern German artwork, relying primarily on political imagery and the disjointed effects of photomontage to represent the country's frenzied cultural changes via a jumble of household appliances and quotidian machinery. Höch set a visual precedent for the new German artwork empowering women technologically in the revolutionary new Germany.

Weimar women sought cultural role models and desired to articulate their changing places in society. A society now suffused with sexist consumer advertising now encouraged young women to compare themselves to commercially acceptable typologies of female behavior and attitudes and analyze how they “measured up”. However, these typologies were often highly restrictive. If women did not perfectly fit within the boundaries of these consumer regulations, it was difficult for them to assert their critical worth in German culture.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 93.

Just as there were conventional restrictions on women's freedom prior in Imperial Germany, new capitalistic constraints snared them after the Weimar Republic took hold. Guidelines enforcing female compliance with new norms of appropriate consumerism and economic integration for women only rendered them more susceptible to male control. A superficial popular culture of class appropriate consumerism even resorted to "sorting" women into various personalities based on such irrelevant things as their posture and dress.

The practice of crossing the legs below the knee indicates quarrelsomeness, but ready appeasability, hot temperament and volatility. Must be led by a strong hand.... Legs held in a rigorous parallel position speak for particular suitability for marriage, adaptability, and inner restraint.¹⁰⁶

These attempts to classify women's personalities via micro-analysis of their physical behaviors (like the position of a woman's legs) reveal an intensifying fear of women's imminent emancipation afflicting some German men in fraught modern times. Could women and women artists in particular now effectively challenge such ludicrous male efforts at policing behavior in a consumer world?

Male authorities in Germany advocated such restraints. The primary method to enforce gender boundaries now was to establish a sense of female moral obligation to stay within the home.

In their concern that modern women were losing sight of their "obligation" to propagate the race, research biologists and medical practitioners increasingly called for the programmatic education of individuals to acquire a "biological conscience" (*biologisches Gewissen*) or personal sense of biological responsibility to society and the race, which would govern their sexual behavior and choice of marriage partner.¹⁰⁷

During the First World War, propaganda artists across Europe created visual policies insisting upon a woman's primary domestic duties. Mass media had a tremendous effect on

¹⁰⁶ Mary Ann Doane, "Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator," *Screen* 23, no. 3-4 (1982): 78, quoted in *ibid.*, 15.

¹⁰⁷ Von Ankum, *Women in the Metropolis*, 14.

the solidification of timeworn cultural norms. Building upon this theme established in the pre-Weimar era, the German artistic serial press (before and even after The First World War) ridiculed the idea of women participating in creative movements with clear public dimensions. For instance, both *die Jugend* and *Simplicissimus* cultivated attitudes that mocked artistically inclined women, believing that a feminine pursuit of creative endeavors was not indicative of any real or trenchant talent. Satirical publications disregarded women as insightful members of any modern aesthetic regime, preferring to dismiss them back to domesticity. In fact, according to many male textual and visual contributors to these publications, “artistic women” did not possess any talent whatsoever. The woman professional, the horrifying “third sex”, was openly scorned in a series of anti-feminist cartoons featured in *Simplicissimus*. The cartoonist, Bruno Paul, painted a biting and satirical image of women who sought to matriculate into creative economies by stating: “You see, miss, there are two sorts of woman artists: the ones who want to marry, and the others who likewise have no talent.” (fig. 32)¹⁰⁸ These sorts of visual slights and insults toward creative women policed the boundaries around artistry, showing how some male German image makers sought to prevent women from infiltrating a previously male-dominated artistic domain.

These views had been established prior to the institution of the Weimar Republic but still gained wide acceptance by a later generation in the 1920s. However, to meet the demands of the decade, German women received mixed messages as they were encouraged to pursue rather paradoxical existences. Mass-market publications propagated to German women incessant commands to pursue motherhood while simultaneously encouraging them to become more economically productive as well. Here one can see the primary

¹⁰⁸ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 26.

manifestation of female modernity: maintaining a household while engaging in a limited array of permissible vocations. In contrast to the Wilhelmine era, which was largely anti-feminist, anti-labor, and anti-modernist, the Weimar Republic offered some new, limited opportunities to women as participants in a productive, resurgent national economy rewarding to image makers.¹⁰⁹

Amidst the chaos of a new governmental order and fresh cultural, social and gender claims, women like Hannah Höch and Gabriele Münter found sporadic opportunities to assert themselves as visual artists and more visible, critical members of society. They struggled to gain legitimacy as engaged female artists in a wounded man's world.

However, movements like the famous Bauhaus were not conducive to outright feminist success. Originally, the Bauhaus promised men and women equal opportunities, but restricted female entry due to the overwhelming number of female applicants. The Bauhaus administration, largely male, limited women students to traditional artistic pursuits, such as ceramic pottery and weaving. Additionally, a male-dominated Bauhaus aesthetic began to exchange practical functionality and warmth in the arts of daily living for the theoretical constructs of male design fraternities. Male Bauhaus designers churned out highly impractical "domestic" spaces ill-equipped to support women as primary care givers in revitalized German home life.

Perhaps men feared that female artisans [of the Bauhaus] would ultimately adapt the trades to suit women's needs, thereby turning a calling that was regarded as being quintessentially masculine – to the point of defining male identity – into a job that was open to all... A marked concentration on artistic basics and on primary colours characterising the programme as a whole resulted in a kind of dualism wherein woman featured as the 'other', complementing men. The founding of the women's class restricted females

¹⁰⁹ Christina Ujma, "Masculine Territories? Women and the Theories of the Avant-Garde" in *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Christiane Schönfeld (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 14.

to one particular area and they were henceforth to be a rare sight in any of the other workshops (excluding pottery that is).¹¹⁰

In a country that had been under the protection of guilds and trade brotherhoods, the introduction of women into the traditionally male education system must have been an unwelcome threat to hegemonic masculinity. Men reacted very strongly to this unwanted infiltration.

To preclude women from taking control, men managed meticulously female creativity and even her activities within the home. In 1924, Berlin architect Bruno Taut, published a book entitled *Die Neue Wohnung: Die Frau als Schöpferin* (The New Home: the Woman as Creator). The book commanded women to strive for a simple, streamlined existence. This meant that a woman could no longer collect material goods (furniture, decorations, and tchotchkes) that reflected and illuminated her feminine qualities. Any personal possession that generated warm, nostalgic emotions must leave the home. This patriarchal doctrine of domestic minimalism encouraged women to purge all knick-knacks, which only collected dust. It dictated that women must also dispose of large pieces of furniture, especially the ones given to her by family members. These family heirlooms allegedly wasted space and stirred up nostalgic feelings. Disposing them ensured that women could avoid these two dreaded side effects of possessing too many historical hand-me-down furnishings. Further to reduce the risk of generating nostalgic emotions, some men refused to allow their women to decorate the home with framed pictures of living relatives. Such items made the woman seem too sentimental. Only photographs of a woman's deceased parents were permitted.

Quite generally, start offloading all that *Gefühlsballast*, (literally: 'emotional baggage') that you women are socialized into carrying around with you.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰ Anja Baumhoff, "What's in the Shadow of a Bauhaus Block?" in *Practicing Modernity: Female Creativity in the Weimar Republic*, ed. Christiane Schönfeld (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006), 63.

Even within the context of domesticity, Weimar masculine design ideals reshaped the very physical walls around women. However, emotion played a crucial role in the development of Weimar artistry. Formerly constrained by sexist traditions, the concept of resurgent, post-war emotion challenged male efforts to restrain the creative expressions of women illustrated in their artwork. Post-war Expressionists communicated more clearly their feelings toward a broken country and its new political and socio-cultural upheavals.

Even artists of the New Objectivity still sought emotional impacts via their startling, unsentimental paintings and drawings. They perpetrated confrontation artworks to expose unflinchingly the terrible realities of the modern world, bringing harsh, emotionally affecting realities to the attention of the public. The artist's primary goal in creating these revelatory paintings and drawings was to elicit an emotional response from the viewer, whether it was disgust, shame, or fear. These paintings often forced viewers to question their personal comprehensions of reality and compare their own visions of reality to the depictions of modern truths as seen by working artists recovering and challenging German craft traditions. In his stunning review of Weimar culture, Eric Weitz asserts:

That was Weimar culture: the restless questioning of what it means to live in modern times, the search for new forms of expression suitable to the cacophony of modern life and the belief in the possibilities of the future.¹¹²

Through her paintings, Münter questioned consistently her role in Weimar German artistic society. She worked independently in the 1920s and strove to perfect and polish her established Fauvist and Expressionist styles. Münter also utilized the techniques of the New Objectivity in order to remain relevant and visible in the art community. Despite her affiliations with the twentieth-century German and French modern art movements, Münter

¹¹¹ Elsaesser, "Camera in the Kitchen", 32.

¹¹² Eric Weitz, *Weimar Germany: Promise and Tragedy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007), 253.

did not actively strive to be modern. In a 1958 interview with art historian Edouard Roditi, Münter stated that her stylistic choices were motivated predominantly by a desire to reflect her own artistic attitudes.

I was never interested in being just modern – I mean in creating a new style. I simply painted in whatever style seemed to suit me best...But I believe I had developed a figurative style of my own, or at least one that suited my temperament, and I have remained faithful to it ever since, with occasional short holidays in the realm of abstraction.¹¹³

Münter refined her intensely personal style of expression throughout the drastic changes in modern art during the Weimar Republic. Pioneering German artists now breaking into the post-war art scene, such as the Dadaist Hannah Höch, began to experiment with photomontages and found object art. They did so in order to question more jarringly the artist's proper tools and role in creative production. However, Münter continuously honed the stylistic techniques she had adopted during her pre-war career. This style consisted of heavily-outlined figures of lone women, line drawings of women seated in unknowable settings, and bucolic landscapes. She also created numerous consciously retrograde still life paintings of floral arrangements and other scenes demonstrating her curious awareness of seventeenth-century *Vanitas* images. During the 1920s and 1930s, Münter tightened her line work in countless drawings and sketches, a practice she had adopted during her two-year travels around the United States. She kept this sketchbook like a diary, recording her thoughts and experiences regularly in a kind of visual shorthand.

Her lengthy, self-imposed exile in Scandinavia, separation from Kandinsky, and the end of *Der Blaue Reiter* all had a profound impact on Münter's creative career. Despite the innovations in Weimar women's culture, Münter experienced great difficulty establishing herself once again. Of all the Bavarian artists working in Germany, Münter had the most

¹¹³ Roditi, *Dialogues*, 120.

trouble selling her work to interested buyers.¹¹⁴ Working primarily alone almost as a recluse, she did not receive any input from fellow artists. She questioned herself constantly if her style was still relevant, and felt deeper uncertainties about her art. Seeking answers, she moved around the country restlessly. She lived successively in Munich, Murnau, Cologne, and Berlin from 1921 to 1928. Münter sensed that she needed some sort of external artistic input to direct her. She became concerned that her still lifes and portraits lacked relevancy in the ultramodern world of Weimar artistry. In 1925, seeking external direction, she attended informal art classes supervised by Arthur Segal, an artist based in Berlin.

Despite her acute self-consciousness, Münter participated actively in numerous exhibitions in Germany. She contributed her work to a collection of the Munich New Secession. She also placed work in a showing of the “International Art Exhibition Düsseldorf”. This was the first post-war avant-garde exhibition in Germany.¹¹⁵ In 1926, she began to exhibit her work with the “Association of Women Artists in Berlin” and participated in other women’s art exhibitions. In 1925-26, Münter successfully exhibited her work at a major retrospective in the Rhineland. The show visited five cities, including Cologne.

Münter’s persistence proves her mission to remain relevant in Germany’s conflicting artistic circles. Though she was loyal to her style and her subjects, she experimented by documenting the most celebrated or controversial subject matter of twentieth-century Germany. Most of the time, these images depicted young, intellectual, emancipated women, the most contentious topic of the Weimar era. She combined these images with stylistic elements of the New Objectivity, which bolstered her legitimacy as a female artist working independently. This does not mean that her emulation of men’s artwork made her more

¹¹⁴ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 26.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

relevant. Rather, her careful utilization of New Objectivity techniques suggests her admiration for experimental modern aesthetics in Germany and Europe as a whole.

Perhaps as a result of her growing visibility in the artistic community, in both museums and galleries, Münter attracted the public eye in the early 1930s. In April of 1931, the German newspaper *Der Kunstwanderer* (The Wandering Artists) published an article with the intriguing title “*Vom Wesen weiblichen Künstertums*” (The Essence of Female Artistry).¹¹⁶ The author, Margot Ries, stated that female artists possess a unique “Ethos”, meaning a truly distinguishing personal character or spirit. Ries contended that many male artists did not possess this quality. Intriguingly, Ries selected Münter as a definitive example of her thesis. The author noted that Münter possessed a “peculiar temperament” that was evident in all areas of her painting. From the article, I deduce that this assertion indicates Ries’ belief in Münter’s artistic authenticity, or independently developed style and execution. She did not merely copy a man’s work like a dilettante or epigone. She refined her own style through a process beginning with minor emulation and culminating with her own, personalized artistic adaptations that suited her unique style. Instead, Münter relied on her own intrinsic understanding of aesthetically pleasing compositions and subject matter. Moreover, a woman must possess “Ethos” to be considered authentic. Any deviation from this indicated artistic amateurism and illegitimacy. According to Ries, an artist’s painterly style, techniques, motifs, and pictorial themes were entirely irrelevant to her legitimacy and authenticity. Those emanated essentially from one’s supervening character or “Ethos”. Spirit and execution of artistry must be combined and studied synthetically.

While intriguing, I believe Ries’ suggestion remains too vague. In my opinion, a large portion of a woman’s artistic authenticity may be found in her subject matter, techniques,

¹¹⁶ Hille, *Die Künstlerin mit der Zauberhand*, 170.

motifs, and themes. In the absence of definitions for these parameters, I must assume that the only determinant of a female artist's authenticity is an indefinable quality or spirit.

However, Ries' assessment of Münter's "peculiar temperament" is accurate. Perhaps influenced by Ries' suggestion, and reinforced by Kandinsky's previous declaration that Münter's art was "...produced from a pure inner instinct", critics and historians still tend to regard her talents as innate and spiritual, outside the limits of any instruction. In 1957, Johannes Eichner, Münter's second partner reiterated this view.

...Creativity in Gabriele Münter bursts forth from her naturalness. She is committed to no rules. Logic offers no directions. She submits to the demands of the motif and the stirrings within herself.¹¹⁷

In 1966, Dr. Hans Konrad Röthel, director of the Municipal Museum of Munich, echoed this idea in a posthumous Münter retrospective:

She possessed a natural talent. Neither ambition nor doctrine influenced it. She cultivated no mannerism that promised success or that, once mastered, might make enduring any success achieved. No ideal guided her development, no theoretical concept suddenly or gradually gained artistic form.¹¹⁸

Kandinsky once noted that Münter's talents existed beyond the reach of pedagogy. He asserted that, "She is bound to a restful, immediate, one might even say innocent, conception of world and nature."¹¹⁹ As reworded by Dr. Reinhold Heller, Kandinsky further claimed that her "status as a fundamentally passive instrument of artistic volition and of nature", a specifically female-associated characterization that denied her the sort of determination and vision attributed to male artists."¹²⁰ Though Münter claimed that she

¹¹⁷ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 58.

¹¹⁸ Hans Konrad Röthel, preface to *Gabriele Münter: Murnau to Stockholm*. New York, NY: Leonard Hutton Galleries; New York: L.H. Hutsnecker, 1961.

¹¹⁹ Ibid, preface.

¹²⁰ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 58.

painted “with the uncertainty of a sleepwalker...”¹²¹, she created artwork stimulated by her intrinsic curiosity about waking life. The feminine quality of her work is defined by her impulsive, natural artistic process, which disregarded structure, theory, and pre-ordained principle so heavily visible in men’s art.

Do these characterizations of Münter as an impulsive artist contradict previous statements regarding her meticulous emulation of Fauvist techniques? Do they repudiate the notion that she painstakingly composed images? Do they imply that Münter’s work is naïve or childish, clichés occasionally included in twentieth-century art historical discourse about Münter, which relegate her work to the status of mere “craft” or “hobby”?¹²² In my opinion, Münter’s impulsive nature facilitated the development of her artistic discernment. After all, the Fauves celebrated (and depicted) impulsivity. She knew precisely which artistic elements to appropriate and how to adapt them successfully in her own work. Instinctive awareness and comprehension of aesthetic principles allowed Münter to implement these emulations and improve upon Fauvist techniques.

Her creativity was not dictated by formal structure, logic, and learning. She chose her subjects according to what pleased her, and rendered them accordingly in adaptive fashion, unregulated by formal techniques. Because she openly exercised this freedom, Münter’s creative processes are transparent in her artwork. As viewers, we can trace her thoughts, moods, and decisions simply by observing her spontaneous brushstrokes and bold and lively palette. I believe that this is certainly what Ries intended by the term “peculiar temperament” in her analysis of Münter’s oeuvre.

¹²¹ Gabriele Münter, note dated February 5, 1933. Gabriele Münter- und Johannes Eichner Stiftung, quoted in Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 59.

¹²² Röthel, *Gabriele Münter: Murnau to Stockholm*, preface.

Münter's insatiable desire to paint and draw components of life that enthused her led her to portray images of controversial Weimar life, specifically the emancipated New Women. Her primary intention in immortalizing these women in drawings was to capture the essence and soul of her sitters, rather than stimulate further controversy. She held fast to the belief that the human body was the external manifestation of inner spiritual essence. Münter took portraiture very seriously and believed that rendering the human likeness could only be done by sincere, true artists, rather than by amateurs only.

The portrait in our time has to do with the individual. To each their own! Is it too insignificant a project, no more than simplistic copying? ... The appropriate symbol must first be discovered from various perspectives, from the momentary accidental expression. Then the laws of the image wait to take the objective up in themselves and give it form. And, in addition, the individual artist injects more or less conscious desires into the pictorial form. Thus, portrait making expands into being one of the greatest problems... The painting of portraits is the boldest and most difficult, the most spiritual, the most extreme task of the artist.¹²³

The pinnacle of Münter's deeply revealing, ethical portraiture is her series of depictions of the New Woman. Between 1926 and 1928, Münter completed a line drawing of journalist, author, and poet Sylvia von Harden titled *Unvergleichlich* or "Unparalleled" (fig. 33). Von Harden became one of the most impactful, iconic images of feminist and lesbian cultures in the Weimar era. She single-handedly personified German avant-garde society and its gender ambivalence. Otto Dix allegedly became transfixed by her, and declared fervently, "I must paint you, I simply must! You are representative of an entire epoch!"¹²⁴

Münter drew von Harden sitting awkwardly on a large cushion, slumping her shoulders in a mannish way. Her cartoonish, distorted legs are splayed awkwardly. She rolls

¹²³ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 111-112.

¹²⁴ Sylvia von Harden replied, "So, you want to paint my lackluster eyes, my ornate ears, my long nose, my thin lips; you want to paint my long hands, my short legs, my big feet – things which can only scare people off and delight no-one?" Dix answered her: "You have brilliantly characterized yourself, and all that will lead to a portrait representative of an epoch concerned not with the outward beauty of a woman but rather with her psychological condition." Sylvia von Harden, *Erinnerungen an Otto Dix*, quoted in Sergiusz Michalski, *New Objectivity: Painting, Graphic Art, and Photography in Weimar Germany 1919-1933* (Köln: Taschen GmbH, 2003), 56.

her left ankle inward to expose the kitten heel of her shoe. Münter rendered the writer in a simple, girlish blouse, which is buttoned neatly all the way up her throat. The hem of her skirt barely reaches her knees, which hang over the cushion's edge. Von Harden's hair is styled once again in the trendy *Bubikopf*, one of the most profound symbols of the New Woman and her emancipation. In her right eye, von Harden wears a monocle, an accessory traditionally worn by upper-class men. Weimar-era lesbian culture adopted the monocle as a fashionable addition to their gender-fluid apparel. To augment the sense of gender ambivalence, Münter eliminated all sense of breasts and feminine curvature. This emphasizes von Harden's androgynous style while also conveying the artist's respect for her subject.

This image is significant because it demonstrates Münter's awareness and advocacy of the New Woman. While she did not directly play an active role in the development of the New Woman, Münter affirmed her support for the New Woman's progressive expansion in Weimar society and artistry. Images of these courageous and modern women allowed Münter to share candidly her opinion about their necessary advancement. I believe Münter's enthusiasm stems from her youth, when she struggled to establish her validity as an artist in the academies that then did not accept young women easily. She continued to pursue the theme of portraiture to celebrate and validate visually the progression of independently minded and ethical feminist culture in the Weimar Republic.

In 1926, Otto Dix repeated the von Harden motif in a large portrait entitled *Portrait of the Journalist Sylvia von Harden*. It prominently features the poet von Harden seated at table smoking a cigarette. Her close, cropped hair, styled in the *Bubikopf*, frames her pale, slender face. Her large mannish hands and awkward posture create an impression of androgyny. The placement of her hands draws viewers' attention to her chest where her breasts should

be. However, because she is such an androgynous figure, Dix has not portrayed her with any hints of a bosom. Her dress hides any feminine curves she may have. The chair behind her, carved ornately from supple wood, possesses more curves than von Harden herself.

This image propelled von Harden into the public eye, and, as a result, to higher levels of fame in Weimar visual worlds. However, Dix did not manipulate her form to be beautiful in keeping with the New Objectivity style. He exploited the natural, awkward shape of her body and focused his attention on exposing her personality. Münter, who sought consistently to illuminate the lives of her subjects in her paintings and drawings, illustrated von Harden with a similar exaggerated physiology. Both Münter and Dix depict her in caricature, highlighting the value of her achievements as a woman, rather than her outward or superficial appearance.

Münter's continued portrayal of the New Woman is highly significant. Despite resentful attitudes toward artful women, Münter continued to depict these women seemingly without fear of male critical retribution. In 1926, the artist composed one of her most famous portraits of a young woman, a painting she named *Röschen* (Little Rose)(fig. 34). The young woman here is pressed against the forefront of the canvas, emphasizing the flattened pictorial surface, stark outline around the woman, and the small cat on her shoulder. Münter portrays the woman sitting stiffly looking at the viewer with the same, pupil-less blue eyes Münter gave Kandinsky in *Boating* (1910). Unblinking and imposingly lined in kohl black, the subject's eyes show the same intensity of the marine, cerulean backdrop. She sits in a quarter turn and her face is not fully exposed to the viewer. Her scorching red lips, straight nose, and uncharacteristically long neck stand in sharp contrast to her harsh black cloak which covers her head and gives her the fleeting appearance of sporting the *Bubikopf*. On her left shoulder, a small orange cat sits comfortably, its eyes staring out at the viewer with

the same blue intensity as its human counterpart. The gaze of each subject meets at an implied middle point, somewhere in the realm of the viewer.

The elements of the composition form a large “X”. The top left corner of the “X” begins at the top of the woman’s head and continues down until the disappearance of her left shoulder located near the bottom right of the canvas. The top right corner of the “X” forms at the top of the cat’s skull and sweeps to the left until the subject’s chest disappears at the bottom left of the canvas. As I explained previously, Münter was highly aware of the shape of her compositions. Rarely did she compose pieces haphazardly. It seems that Münter was meticulous about placing her subjects in a visually-pleasing, but serendipitous arrangement, enduring characteristics of her paintings that can also be found in Fauve canvases.

Additionally, viewers may observe once again Münter’s keen, Fauvist understanding of color. The orange tabby cat contrasts sharply with its blue background and brilliant eyes. This theme is echoed in the flesh tones of the female and in her eye color. As I have discussed, Münter understood color play and employed this technique thoroughly in her artwork, a trend utilized frequently by the Fauves, and one she long borrowed and refined.

Münter exaggerates the sense of picture plane flatness by neglecting to include elements of realistic shadowing. Instead, she relies upon lines to convey shape and structure. This example is reminiscent of previous examples of Fauvism: flattened space, undisguised brushstrokes, and playful color. One can also appreciate here the linear artistry Münter acquired through study of modern French print cutting techniques, another kindred art form dear to the Fauvists. The difference in *Röschchen* from the aforementioned portraits of women is the lack of spontaneous chromatic liveliness. The 1920s cultural movement of the New Sobriety, which called for restraint and self-discipline, began to influence Münter’s fine art

and graphic works. Her more restrained palette here is evidence of this effect across German visual arts. The subject matter does not necessarily meet the standards of the New Sobriety, but the dulled color palette certainly aligns itself with evolving modern artistic ideals.

This particular painting bears stunning resemblance to the portraits made by the Italian painter Amedeo Modigliani (1884-1920). His images frequently featured solitary women surrounded by flattened color planes.¹²⁵ Münter's *Röschen* features a similar style. Her slightly elongated features resemble Modigliani's women. Whether this distinct stylistic overlap is intentional is unknown. However, the similarities reveal the close connections between artistic circles active in early twentieth-century Europe.

From 1924 to 1925, Münter completed a contemplative portrait called *In Gedanken*, or "In Thought" (fig. 35). This oil on canvas work features the profile of a young woman, absorbed in her own meditations. Her hair is short, or perhaps tied up in a small knot at the nape of her neck. Her eyes point downward and she does not interact at all with us as the viewer. A rosy patch blossoms on her solitary visible cheek, and her pink lips pout in contemplation. A slight section of her neck is exposed to the viewer, mostly concealed by her high collar, which is rendered in a deep and dusky blue.

This is one of the most striking examples of Münter's enduring talent for chromatic realism. The shadows on the woman's face, the careful administration of transparent, rosy hues on her cheeks, and her pale, smooth skin are indicative to Münter's ability to translate color visually onto canvas. Her abandonment of brilliant tones here reveals her turn toward somberness, once again a visual instance of the New Sobriety and the New Objectivity in the Weimar Republic. Münter, I believe, is seen here striving to acclimate to new, Weimar

¹²⁵ Modigliani's *Head of a Woman*, 1915, (fig. 36) and *A Woman*, 1917-1920, (fig. 37) epitomize the artist's commitment to this style.

standards of visual expression and German visual politics, especially as they privilege views of thinking modern women.

To compare Münter's war-era and Weimar-era representations of femininity is akin to comparing different artists in the same movement. The overall disposition of her portraiture of women changes significantly. From the years 1914 to 1918, Münter's depictions of femininity often show women in interior spaces, completely isolated from the world beyond. These portraits symbolized the trauma she experienced after the separation from Kandinsky. To give a voice to her sorrow and confusion, she focused on themes of isolation and confinement. In her Weimar-era images, Münter adopts an approach more similar to her pre-war paintings. Rather than illustrating women in darkened interiors, she depicts them pressed against flattened color planes. This technique ensures the viewer's attention will remain on the woman herself as the subject of the painting, not merely as a character in a scene. Once again, her subjects possess complete authority over their spectators. Münter now privileges female character over female context.

The New Modernity looked drastically different to Münter than to her fellow artists. Because she was now older (she turned 43 in 1920) than the young, modern artists working in Weimar Germany, Münter frequently devoted her energies to representing images most familiar to her. Typically, that meant creating moderately sized landscape paintings of the surrounding Bavarian countryside. Münter is one of many in a long line of German artists to become enthralled by the beauty of nature. Beginning with the Romantics in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, German artists had a long tradition of glorifying the mysticism of nature via artwork. Münter was enchanted by the mountainous Bavarian landscape. She repeatedly painted the mountainous countryside surrounding her Murnau home. In her 1941 diary, Münter remarked, "Still life is [like] the piano – landscape = the

orchestra.”¹²⁶ Her contemporaries, like Hannah Höch, seldom composed landscape images because they simply did not reflect the modern, urbanized, commercialized world enough. Modernity was an urban phenomenon and creating landscapes removed viewers to more peaceful, now vanishing rural lifeways.

But I am not asserting that Münter fled the modern, only that her modernity manifested itself in a different form. Because there were so many variations on “modernity” in Weimar Germany, it is certainly acceptable to label Münter as a modernist painter. No other category can hold her given her Fauvist inspirations. She did not strive for it, but she achieved a high level of modernity by pursuing art autonomously and navigating adroitly between schools of modern art, never confining herself to any one easy categorization. Her modern, independent lifestyle distinguishes her from those who worked in larger artistic circles. Though Münter had begun her major artistic career that way, she continued the work by herself. Beginning in 1914, Münter worked primarily alone. During these years of isolation and independent work, Münter developed and perfected her style detached from current, urban aesthetic innovators, and worked diligently to please herself by heeding her own artistic urges.

Her recurring depictions of landscapes are strong evidence of this bent. As previously mentioned, most modern, avant-garde artists neglected to represent landscape, as their agitated, urbanized style did not extend to it. In 1931, Münter captured an autumnal image of her home on canvas (*The Russians' House*, fig. 38), likely painted *en plein air* from the edge of her property. In this image, Münter carefully constructs a post-Impressionistic rendition of her home settled underneath a sheet of steel-grey sky. The house is tucked behind trees and hedges, a position that makes it look even more rural than it was in reality.

¹²⁶ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 127.

One person dressed in a red garment lounges comfortably by the open window in the second story sitting room. The leaves of the trees are tinged with burnished orange and copper, heralding the arrival of the fall. The last flowers in her garden burst to life before the wintery chill descends. The image imparts a sensation of peacefulness in a bucolic atmosphere, while also emphasizing Münter's connection to her own private home. Note, too, that Münter still embraced the Murnau locals' ascription of the house as the "Russian's".

Later in the same year, Münter completed a vertical landscape painting entitled *The Way to Fürstalm* (*Weg zur Fürstalm*) (fig. 34). A small, rural path extends into the background toward brightly colored houses in the distance. It is high summer, and tall, leafy trees hang over the small path, shading it from the blazing sunlight. Large shadows cover the ground, striping the gray trail with thick, inky lines. In this piece, Münter pays enduring homage to her earlier Fauvist palette, employing a wide range of greens, oranges, blues, and reds. She blended these hues minimally to achieve a puzzle-like effect. Though the colors here do not achieve the same vividness as her earlier tones, there is ample evidence of her roots in Fauve and Expressionist chromatic inventions. Additionally, Münter outlined the trees in the scene in darkened tones, both those along the path and those in the distance. This sharply references Gauguin's technique of *cloisonnism*, and acknowledges her *Hinterglasmalerei* pictures in the type of artful synthesis Münter alone among modern German painters could perpetuate.

Both of these images indicate Münter's deep appreciation for nature and her awareness of European, French, and German artistic traditions. The tradition can be traced back to the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Romantic, pantheistic artists. They were convinced that entering into nature should be a portal to even more deeply mystical experiences. Rainer Maria Rilke, the esteemed German Bohemian modernist poet,

appropriated this tradition in 1903, when he wrote of the connections that early twentieth-century modern artists should forge with nature. He contended that these artists should

...prefer the eternal to the temporal, prefer the essential order of things to passing inventions, and see as their task the embrace of nature in order to accommodate themselves somewhere within her grand interrelationships, since they cannot convince her to be submissive to them. And through these few isolated individuals all of humanity comes closer to nature... From this point of view it would appear that the theme and intention of all art is contained in the harmony of the individual with the absolute.¹²⁷

Münter thoroughly embraces this viewpoint in her artwork. She endeavored to expose her viewers to the beauty of nature much in the same way as her French Fauve counterparts colorfully re-energized viewers' deeper connections to landscape. Later critics disapproved of these images, believing that they did not fully embody the modern and industrious German spirit. However, Münter's total and ongoing disregard for these criticisms further indicates her objective to paint subjects dearest to her. This is one of the most distinctively modern elements of Münter's career as a woman and as an unabashed artist synthesizing contemporary expressive movements.

It can be argued that Münter was never preoccupied with future acclaim. She did not push the boundaries of visual art to create an entirely new, widely recognized style. Inventing a distinctive visual artistry that suited her needs was her primary motivation.

This allowed her to combine elements of the New Modernity with the French-inspired visual innovations Münter learned in her *Blauer Reiter* days. Münter successfully integrated her artful past with an evolving, modernist artistry. She always combined techniques that she had learned during the Kandinsky years with distinctive methods she fostered later in her career. This achievement stands in sharp contrast to other modern artists of the twenties. They surged vigorously forward into new realms of the avant-garde.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 146.

Münter was more circumspect and stubbornly loyal to expressive forms and techniques central to the evolutionary wave of early European modernism.

To demonstrate Münter's proficiency in such enduringly synthetic work, I will conclude this chapter with one final example. In 1934, one year after the Weimar Republic had ceased to exist, Münter completed one of her most famous canvases entitled *Breakfast with the Birds* or *Frühstück mit Vögel* (fig. 25). In this piece, Münter refers to *The Future* (*Zukunft*) (fig. 7) from 1917. In the 1934 image, Münter represents herself seated at a round breakfast table, which has been topped with a white tablecloth. A small assortment of breakfast foods and beverages are positioned before her. She turns her back to us, much like her 1910 *Boating* painting, facing a window with its red curtains open. Just beyond the window, a flock of winter birds perch on the snowy, empty branches of a tree. Münter sits quietly at the bottom of the canvas, wearing a navy blouse. We are only able to see her head and her shoulders, similar to previous images of women. She gently tilts her head as she gazes out the window, as if wondering once more what the future will bring. The sky is a clear, crystalline blue, directly contrasting with the scarlet curtains that frame the window.

This image simultaneously pays homage to Münter's previous painting *The Future*, while visually endorsing the artistic theme of the *Fensterbilder* (window pictures) that Matisse created most notably in his *Interior at Nice* (fig. 22). Münter alludes to her past while simultaneously encouraging her viewer to consider the future. The year of this canvas is highly significant. Three short years later, the artistic community collapsed under the vicious, bigoted and xenophobic depredating of the German National Socialist (Nazi) regime. Münter painted this in retrospect to her richest, international artistic roots. The painting may be seen as prophetic. It predicts visually the prolonged artistic and cultural winter of Nazi Germany.

How do these images convey Münter's perceptions of femininity in interwar Germany (1918-1939)? I believe the answer lies in her comparative analysis of females. She never painted women in a sexualized manner, but rather renders their bodies discretely and respectfully. Recalling the previous example, *Return from Shopping*, Münter carefully portrays the woman's torso, obscuring all feminine curves that might elicit unwanted male attention. Femininity, in Münter's eyes, was solely to be seen via personal achievement, action, and behavior, rather than as a physiological or erotic state. Münter rooted these beliefs in her youth, when she first experienced biased social attitudes limiting her ambitions to become a professional female artist. She reacted to these views in paintings like *Boating*, where she, as a woman, plays the essential role as the commander and director of the tiny vessel. She is essential to its forward progression, just as she paints modern women sensibly engaged in the progressive advancement of modern German society.

Münter's concentration on depicting the androgynous, liberated New Woman, tender interactions between mothers and daughters, and introspective young women often alone in interior spaces expose her respect for various acts and expressions of womanhood and femininity throughout her life. When she illustrated traditional expressions of conventional femininity (women in domestic environments) and less conventional, forthright exemplars of the New Woman, Münter audaciously depicted modern womanhood as a perpetual state of self-satisfying invention and reinvention. Her loyal reliance on an array of European, indeed international, expressive means and forms assured her escape from the many aesthetic and gender conventions of German and Bavarian society.

Conclusion

Gabriele Münter became the finest female German Fauve operating in early twentieth-century Germany. Despite encountering limiting, potentially damaging social constraints, Münter resisted traditional female gender roles and overcame authoritative masculine regulations for women. Her intrinsic comprehension of artistic principles began during her sojourn in the United States, where she began to develop and hone independently a deeply personal artistic style.

Her numerous, colorful contributions to modern, urbane aesthetic movements reveal her close affiliations with avant-garde French art. These images demonstrate Münter's adroit and careful appropriation and subsequent modification of modern Fauve practices. She utilized extensively an unrestrained color palette and rendered idyllic landscapes and cosmopolitan subjects in pure, undiluted pigments. Emulating Fauve examples, Münter distorted perspectives in her interior scenes, challenging and transforming conventional principles of naturalism.

In her portraiture from 1907 to 1917, Münter developed a complex visual inventory of symbols to define vital characteristics of German femininity. These iconographies defied historical classifications of women and women's activities. Münter granted her female subjects total authority over predominantly male spectatorship. By doing this, she contradicted centuries of canonical standards that dictated that women are mere art objects.

In her wartime portraiture, Münter concentrated on developing motifs that conveyed concepts of female isolation during combat. She addressed visually the psychological impact of alienation, and its effects upon her own emotions. These symbolic representations of feminine solitude in the household challenged notions of traditional domestic life. Her careful, meticulously symmetrical compositions refute visually the tendency to sexualize the

female body. Münter renders respectfully each of her female subjects to conceal all suggestions of feminine anatomy. This sympathetic practice grants her female subjects privacy, as well as agency over their audiences.

Münter's unusually lengthy career enabled her to witness the decline of modern German Feminist ideologies and the rise of the National Socialist dictatorship. The Weimar Feminist movement waned in the summer of 1932, when the sexist National Socialist party became the largest party in the German Parliament. Financially starved by the great world Depression, the League of German Women's Association (*Bund Deutsche Frauenvereine* or BDF) also lost its appeal to new generation of German women, many of whom enthusiastically joined fascist women's organizations under direct Nazi control. On the surface, this shift may seem indicative of women's constricting choices and a return to the household where German fascists believed most women belonged. However, this German women's movement "represented a synthesis of reaction and progressive views that is characteristic of fascist ideology...[The Nazis'] real concern was with women as bearers of the future 'master race'... Hitler was careful too to stress that women were not inferior but rather, in their own way, equal."¹²⁸ Hitler hoped that this cautious assessment of women's worth would be interpreted differently from Imperial standards of womanhood. Women became esteemed once more for their ability to bear children. Hitler considered Gabriele Münter, a modern woman artist swiftly leaving her childbearing years, and the numerous women like her, utterly worthless to advancing Germany under the Third Reich.

After Adolf Hitler recklessly gained power as Reich Chancellor of Germany in 1933, Münter's creative output shifted once more. A traveling exhibition of her work from 1908 to 1933 suffered attacks from National Socialist sympathizers. Politically orchestrated public

¹²⁸ Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany*, 234.

censure forced Münter to adopt a more compliant style. Cautiously advised by her second partner, the art critic Johannes Eichner, Münter began painting almost exclusively the bucolic landscapes of rural Germany. Even in this darkening political climate, Münter found inspiration in the mountains and sparkling lakes surrounding her home in Murnau. In an effort to adhere to current styles, Münter completed a series of paintings focused on the construction of the Olympiastrasse, a massive Nazi road project associated with the winter Olympic games.¹²⁹ Despite her previous affiliations with modern art, and the criticism she received, one of Münter's landscapes appeared in a major art exhibition called "Adolf Hitler's Streets in Art."¹³⁰ Fearful of the worsening political situation and stressed by her now disastrously dwindling finances, Münter and Eichner fled to the comparative quiet and safety of Murnau. At this time, Münter passed on the house ownership to Eichner, who accepted the remaining costs associated with the house, easing Münter's fiscal burden.

In an effort to avoid further Nazi-inspired criticism, Eichner submitted several of Münter's paintings for one of the largest National Socialist art exhibitions in 1937. The director of the exhibition immediately rejected her works. However, Münter and Eichner attended the exhibition to appear compliant with Nazi artistic regulations. Hitler was thrilled with the show. He previously complained that Germany did not have enough prominent artistic talent. At the opening of the exhibition, he asserted, "I have no doubt, the Almighty will elevate a few from this multitude of decent creators of art into the starry realm of the immortal, divinely inspired artists of the great past."¹³¹ Hitler's reasoning to seize control of German artistic production became twofold. First, he believed that absolute power over German culture and artistic endeavors would ensure the country's triumph. Under his rule,

¹²⁹ Heller, *Gabriele Münter*, 28.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 28.

¹³¹ Mary-Margaret Doggin, "'Decent' vs. 'Degenerate' Art: The National Socialist Case," *Art Journal* 50, no. 4 (1991): 84-92, accessed September 1, 2015, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/777328>.

Hitler assumed that Germany would produce art, music, and literature of a cohesive style that would glorify the country. Hitler relied upon visual art to disseminate broadly Nazi cultural and aesthetic ideals. This characterized his total, demagogic approach to his dictatorship.

Repulsed by the cosmopolitan, European avant-garde, Hitler condemned a lengthy list of modern artists as “degenerates”. The Nazis viewed modern art (and its many Jewish practitioners) as synonymous with cultural degradation. Degenerate art (*Entartete Kunst*) became the term used by the Nazi party to describe nearly all pieces of modern art. They foolishly and boorishly denounced artists of all backgrounds, races, and religions, branding them as dangerous enemy aliens. In Hitler’s opinion, truly German art concentrated on depicting scenes of the rural German peasantry, women as mothers, and heroic, masculine warriors – avatars of a “master” Aryan race. In essence, the benighted Nazis favored art that encouraged traditional ways of life, emphasizing a bogus morality and the Germanic spirit. Any art that contradicted this view was deemed a threat to the German nation.

An alleged “Degenerate Art” exhibition opened in Munich on July 19th, 1937 under Nazi control. It circulated through major cities throughout Germany to indoctrinate citizens into Nazi “values”. Münter and Eichner attended the exhibition, and observed that many of the featured artists had been friends and acquaintances. A large majority of the works on display came from *Der Blaue Reiter*. Upon returning home, Münter gathered her extensive collection of *Der Blaue Reiter* works, featuring over a hundred of Kandinsky’s early paintings and drawings, and hid them in a secret room the basement of her house. For the entire duration of the Second World War, Münter kept them hidden to prevent them from being destroyed by the Nazis or later when light-fingered American occupation troops arrived in Murnau in 1945.

After the war, Münter resolutely reestablished her artistic career. Modern art revival movements erupted across the country in a desperate effort to expiate myriad Nazi crimes against art and humanity. Art historians, critics, and museum directors sought out Münter, who still lived in her Murnau retreat. Some Germans now celebrated her contributions to modernist art. Beginning in 1950, museums across the country held numerous Gabriele Münter exhibitions, exposing her work to a nation slowly recovering from the brutalities and bigotries of the Nazi era.

In 1957, twenty years after the opening of the abominable Degenerate Art exhibition, Münter donated her entire collection of *Der Blaue Reiter* artwork to the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus und Kunstbau in Munich, Germany, the preeminent south German art institution. This collection included more than ninety pristinely preserved Kandinsky paintings, and twenty-five of her own works. Because of this generous donation, the museum now holds the largest collection of *Der Blaue Reiter* works in the world.

Münter died on May 19th, 1962. Since then, she has earned posthumous celebration for her adaptations and artistic achievements and contributions to modern art. Few have noted her contributions to the Fauvist tradition. In the early 1960s, director of the Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Hans Konrad Röthel, published a small, now overlooked piece on Münter's art. In it, he regarded Münter as "the Doyenne of Fauve painting", stating, "What Kandinsky worked out step by step with such reflection to seem to have been achieved with all the force for her native absoluteness, almost playfully, by Gabriele Münter in one happy moment. Jawlensky's approach had much in common with Münter's. But it was Jawlensky who followed in Münter's footsteps rather than the reverse."¹³² This assertion confirms Münter's avid embrace of the Fauvist style and palette,

¹³² Röthel, *Gabriele Münter: Murnau to Stockholm*, preface.

marking her as one of the most catalytic forces in modern German art. Münter took new paths for a German woman and explored territory unknown to her neighbor artists. She was spurred on by her inquisitive temperament. She is remembered as the premier pioneer of modern Fauvist and Expressionist art in twentieth-century Germany.

In 1959, just a few years prior to her death, Münter revisited her previous 1931 image *The Way to Fürstalm* (fig. 39). With aging hands, she carefully recreated the image, sketching the leafy trees in precisely the same manner as the earlier example. Just as before, the autumnal trees cast long shadows across the sunny, warm path. The way is lined with waves of fallen leaves, illuminating the ground in copper and fiery orange. She renders the sky once more in purest cerulean blue, punctuating the colorful backdrop with fluffy white clouds. The painting's composition and subject matter remains largely identical to its previous rendition. The most profound change is the color palette. Vivid hues return to saturate the canvas, bathing it in vibrant, Fauvist color. She named the composition *Weg im bunten Oktober* (Path in Colorful October) (fig. 40). This last, great masterwork completed by Münter demonstrates her acknowledgement of her past achievements as a *Künstlerin*, and her persistent desire to paint the world resolutely and in vibrant, unabashedly brighter colors.

Appendix



Figure 1. Gabriele Münter. *Still Life, Red*, 1909. Oil on cardboard. 53 x 39 cm. Private collection.



Figure 2. Gabriele Münter. *A merry crowd eating dinner on the ground*, 1899-1900. Photograph.



Figure 3. Claude Monet. *Luncheon on the Grass*. 1865-1866. Oil on canvas. 248 cm x 217 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Figure 4. Gabriele Münter. *Mädchen im weißen Kleid auf einer Veranda*, 1899-1900. Photograph.



Figure 5. Gabriele Münter. *Portrait of Marianne von Werefkin*, 1909. Oil on cardboard. 37.5 x 44.5 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.

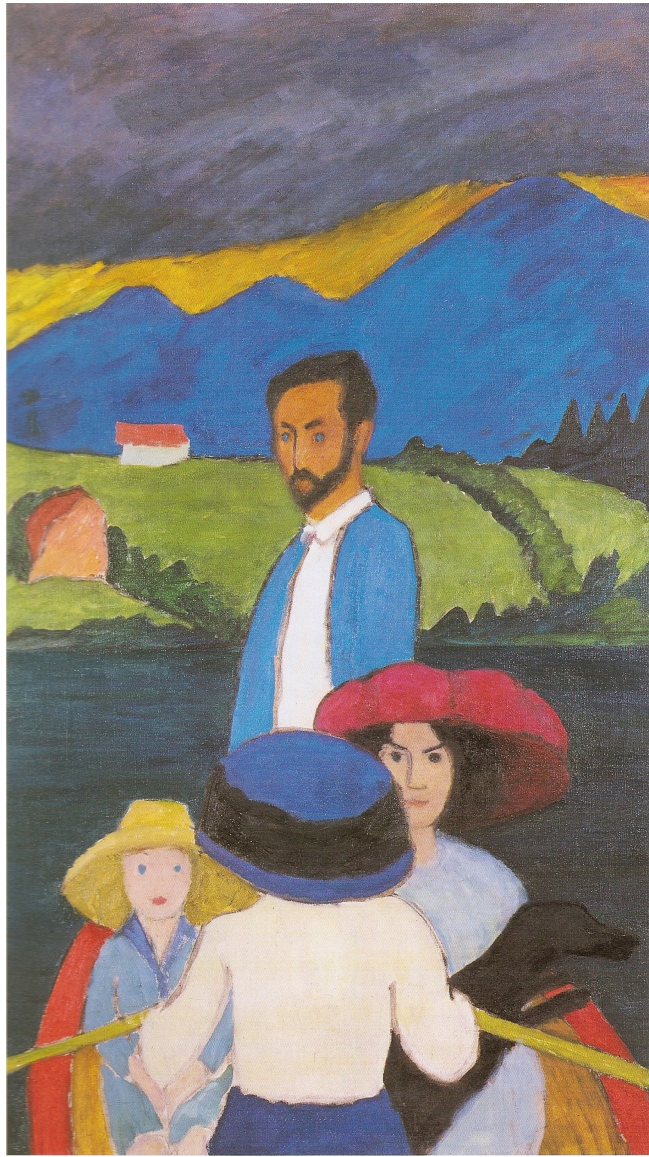


Figure 6. Gabriele Münter. *Boating*, 1910. Oil on canvas. 125.1 x 73.3 cm. Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee.



Figure 7. Gabriele Münter. *The Future*, 1917. Oil on canvas. 100.5 x 66.5 cm. Cleveland Art Museum, Cleveland.



Figure 8. Gabriele Münter. *Meditation*, 1917. Oil on canvas. 100.5 x 66.5 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.



Figure 9. Gabriele Münter. *Gelbes Haus mit Apfelbaum*, 1910. Oil on cardboard. 42 x 49.5 cm.



Figure 10. Gabriele Münter. *Country House (Kandinsky in the Garden)*, 1912. Oil on cardboard. 33 x 40.7 cm. Private collection.



Figure 11. Gabriele Münter. *Self Portrait in Front of an Easel*, 1909. Oil on canvas. 75 x 57.5 cm. Princeton Art Museum, Princeton.



Figure 12. Gabriele Münter. *Self Portrait*, 1910. Oil on paper. 49 x 34 cm. Fondazione Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid.



Figure 13. Gabriele Münter. *An der Staffelei* (*At the Easel*), 1930. Oil on cardboard. 40 x 31 cm. Private collection.



Figure 14. Gabriele Münter. *View of Murnau Moors*, 1908. Oil on cardboard. 32.7 x 40.5 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.

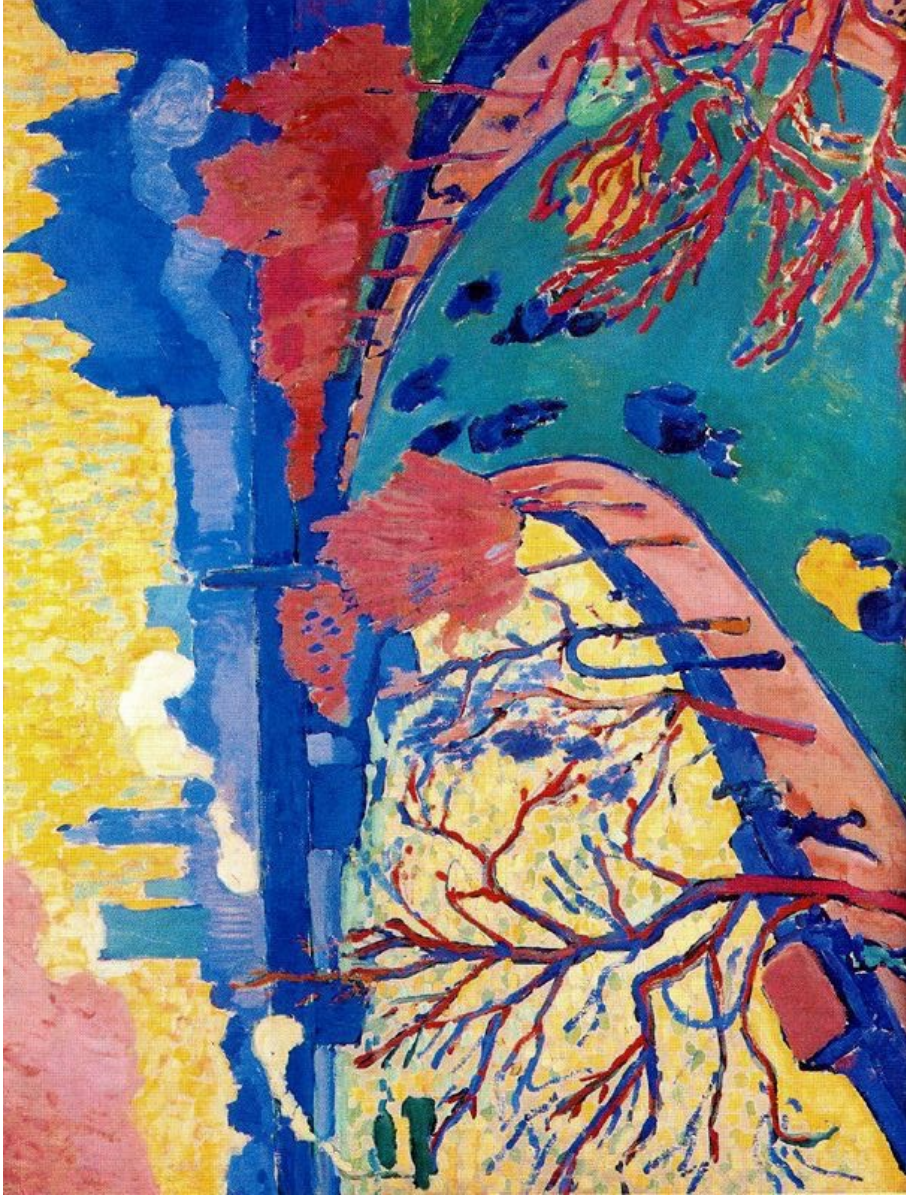


Figure 15. André Derain. *Charing Cross Bridge, London*, 1906. Oil on canvas. 81 x 100 cm. Musée d'Orsay, Paris.



Figure 16. Henri Matisse. Study for *Luxe, Calme, et Volupté*, 1904. Oil on canvas. 32.7 x 41 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.



Figure 17. Henri Matisse. *The Green Stripe*, 1905. Oil on canvas. 40.5 x 32.5 cm. Statens Museum for Kunst, Copenhagen.



Figure 18. Gabriele Münter. *Portrait of a Young Woman*, 1909. Oil on canvas. 70.5 x 52.4 cm. Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee.

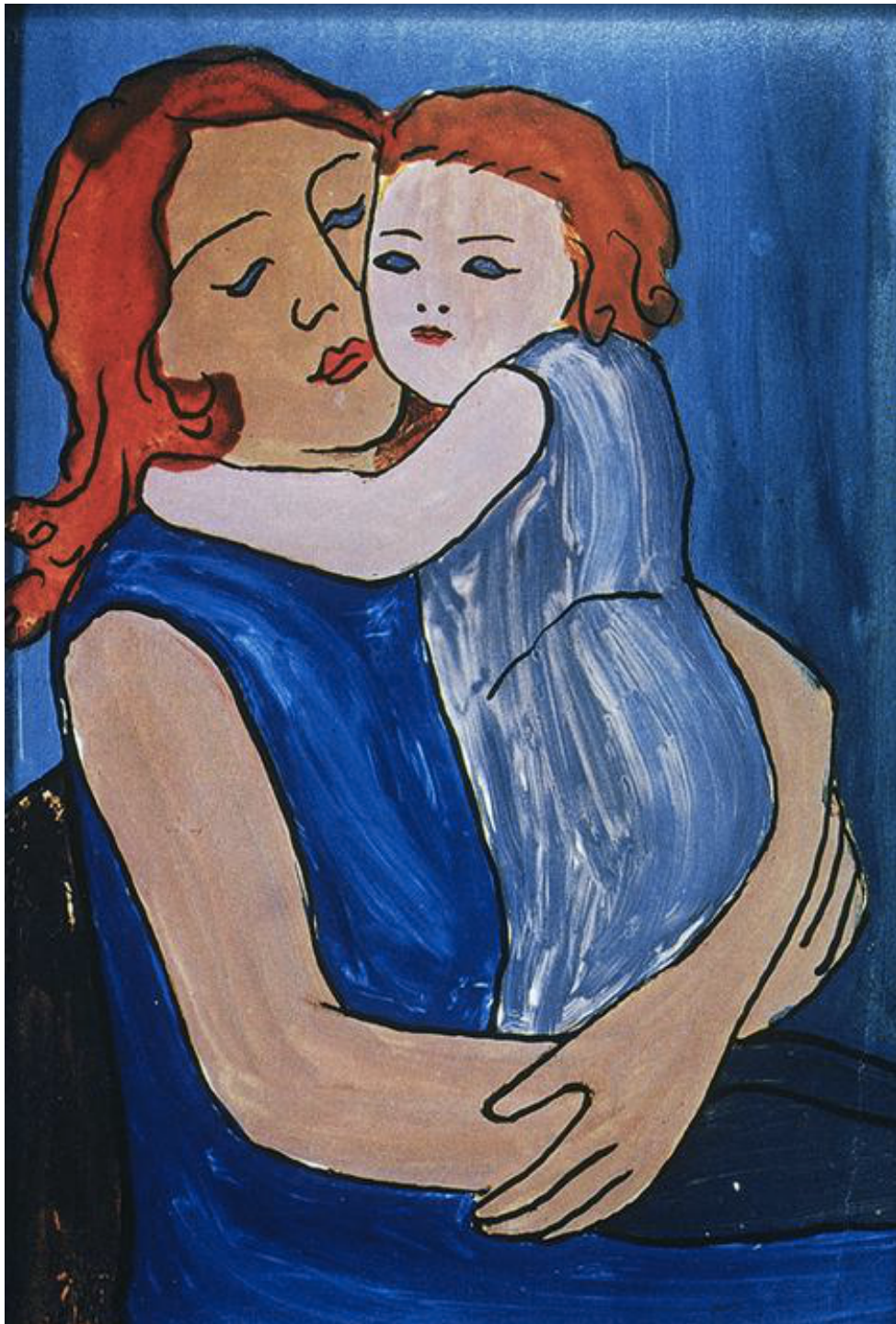


Figure 19. Gabriele Münter. *Mother with Child in Gray Dress*, 1925. Reverse glass painting, 13.8 x 10 cm.



Figure 20. Gabriele Münter. *Return from Shopping (In the Streetcar)*, 1908-1909. Oil on cardboard. 59 x 39 cm. Private collection.



Figure 21. Gabriele Münter. *Still Life with Figure II (Mrs. Simonovich)*, 1910. Oil on canvas. 76 x 79 cm. Gabriele Münter- und Johannes Eichner Stiftung, Munich.



Figure 22. Henri Matisse. *Interior at Nice*, 1919/1920. Oil on canvas. 67 x 55 cm. St. Louis Art Museum, St. Louis.



Figure 23. Henri Matisse. *Harmony in Red*, 1908. Oil on canvas. 180 cm x 220 cm. Hermitage Museum, St. Petersburg.



Figure 24. Henri Matisse. *The Open Window*, 1905. Oil on canvas, 55.3 x 46 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.



Figure 25. Gabriele Münter. *Breakfast with Birds*, 1934. Oil on cardboard. 45 x 55 cm. National Museum of Women in Arts, Washington D.C.

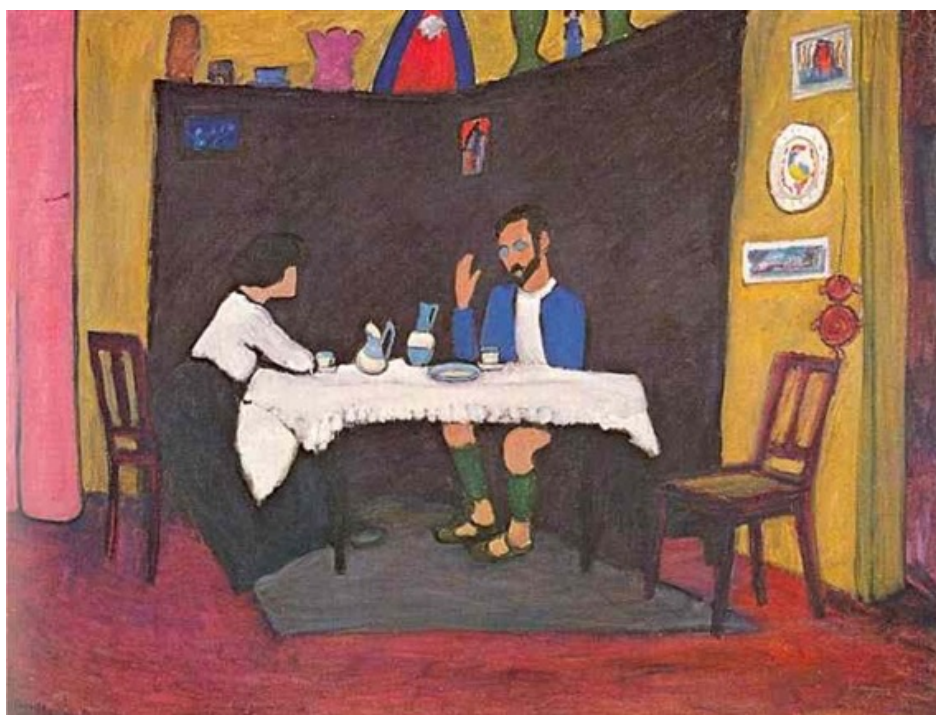


Figure 26. Gabriele Münter. *Kandinsky and Bossi at the Table*, 1912. Oil on canvas. 95 x 125.5 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.



Figure 27. Gabriele Münter. *Still Life: Bedroom*, 1909. Oil on cardboard. 53 x 71 cm. Gabriele Münter- und Johannes Eichner Stiftung, Munich.

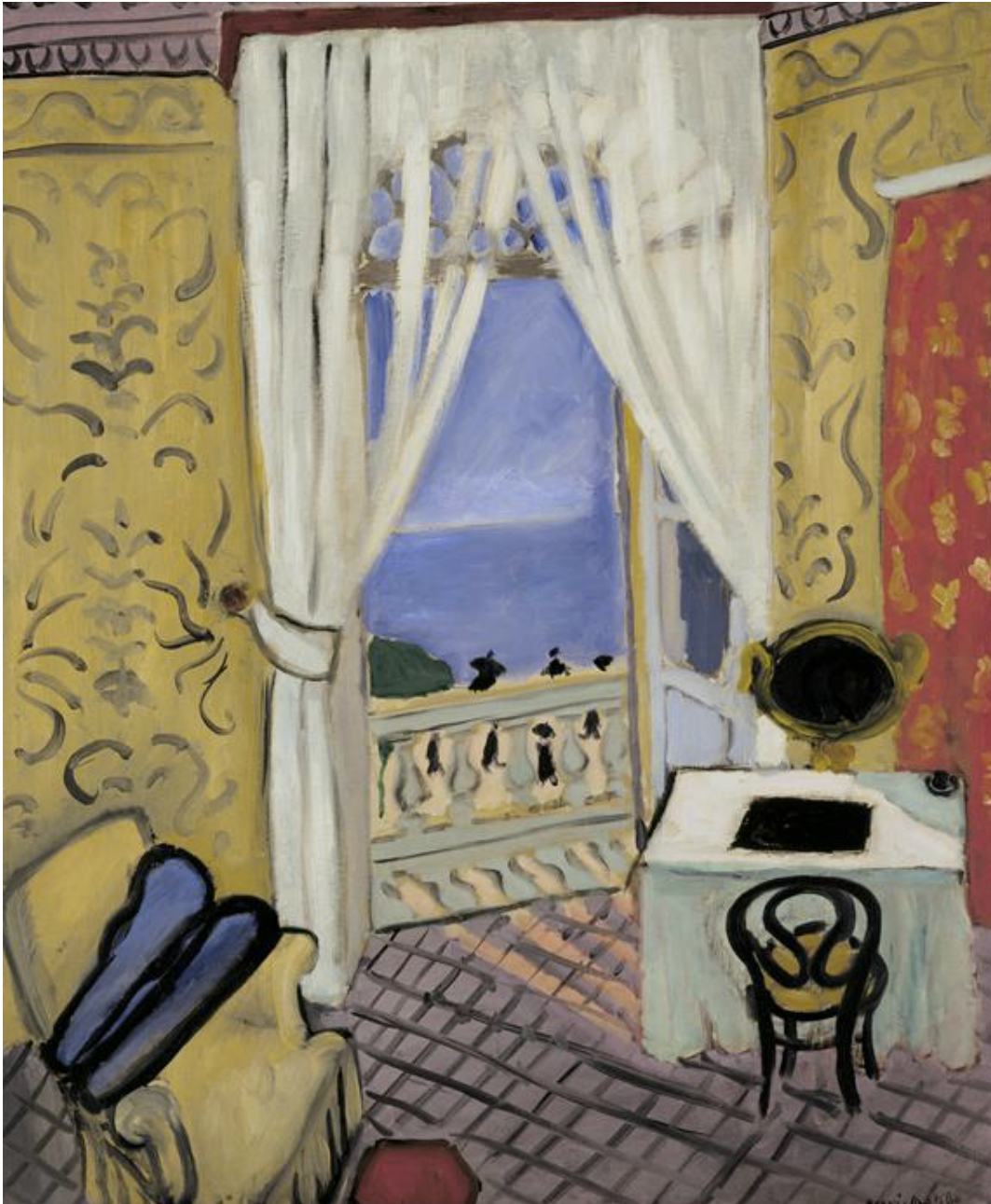


Figure 28. Henri Matisse. *Interior with Violin Case*, 1918-1919. Oil on canvas. 73 x 60 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

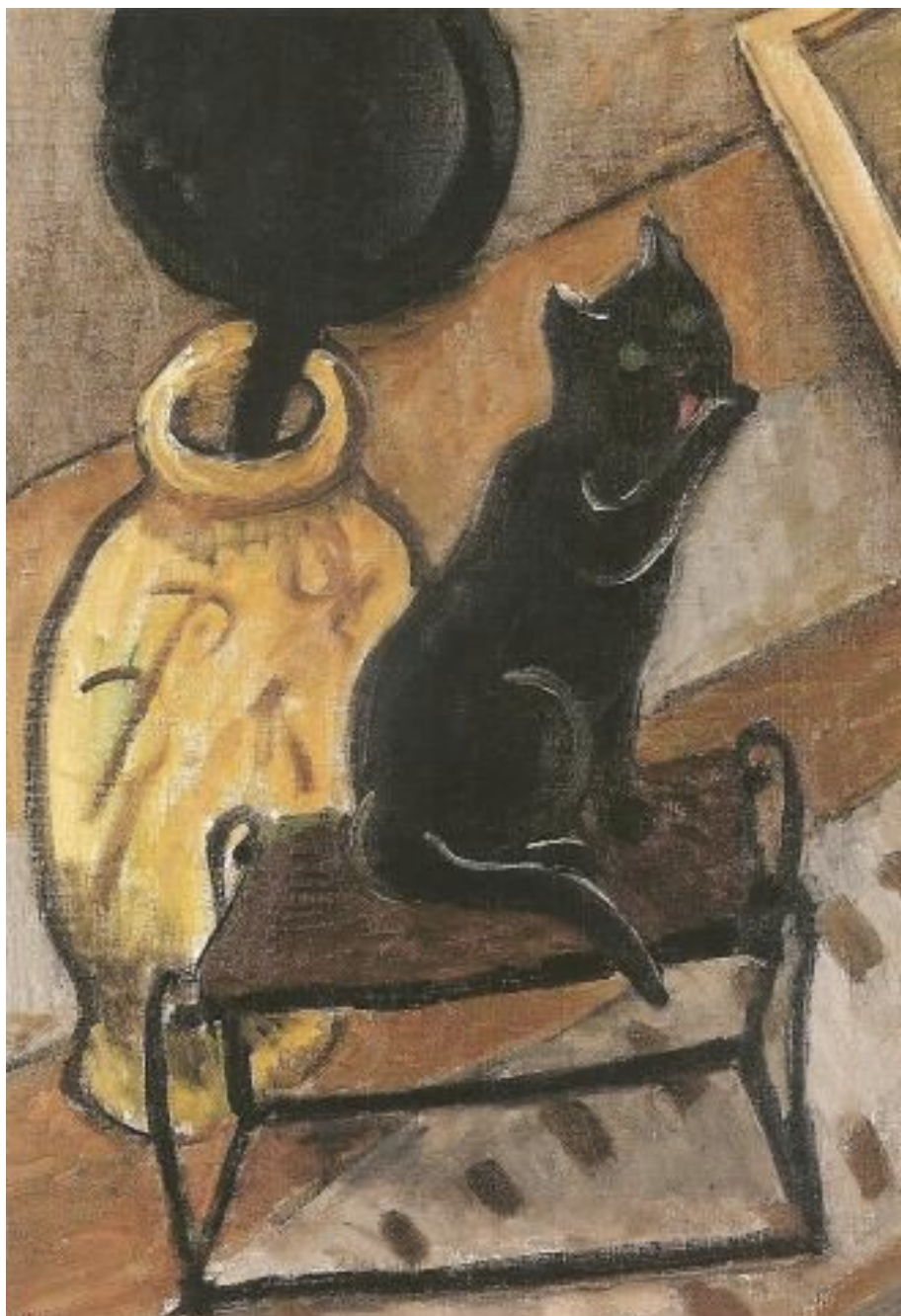


Figure 29. Gabriele Münter. *Kater und Hut* (Tomcat and Hat), 1930. Oil on canvas. 64.5 x 49.5 cm. Private collection.



Figure 30. Otto Dix. *Stormtroopers Advance under Gas*, 1924. Aquatint and dry point, platemark: 19.6 x 29.1 cm; sheet: 35.3 x 47.5 cm. Berlin State Museum, Berlin.



Figure 31. Hannah Höch. *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Dada Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch of Germany*, 1919-1920. Photomontage, 114 x 90 cm. Staatliche Museen, Berlin.



Figure 32. Bruno Paul. “Malweiber”, 1901. *Simplicissimus*, volume 6, no. 15, page 117.

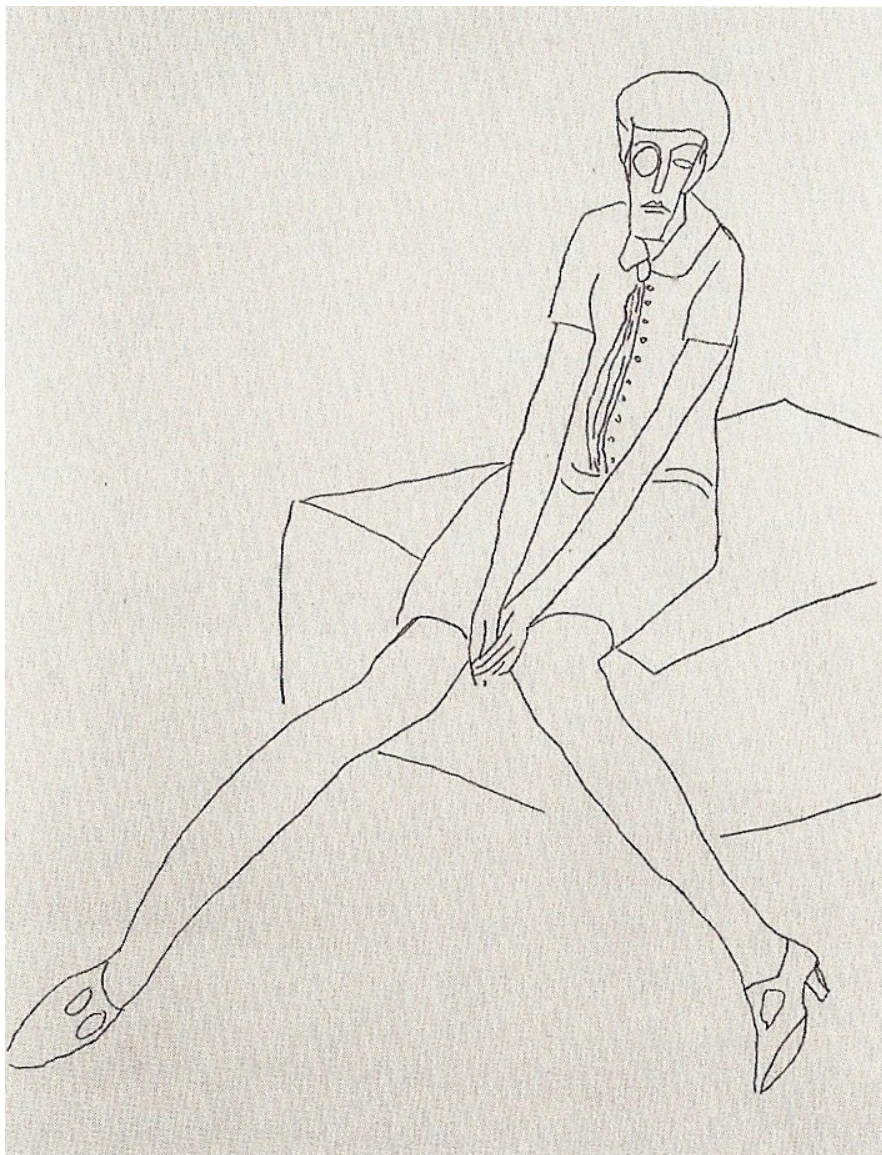


Figure 33. Gabriele Münter. *Unvergleichlich (Die Dichterin Sylvia von Harden)*, 1926/28. Pencil drawing. 29 x 22 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.



Figure 34. Gabriele Münter. *Röschchen*, 1926. Oil on cardboard. 33 x 44.7 cm. Location unknown.



Figure 35. Gabriele Münter. *In Gedanken*, 1924-1925. Oil on illustration board. 36.5 x 29 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.

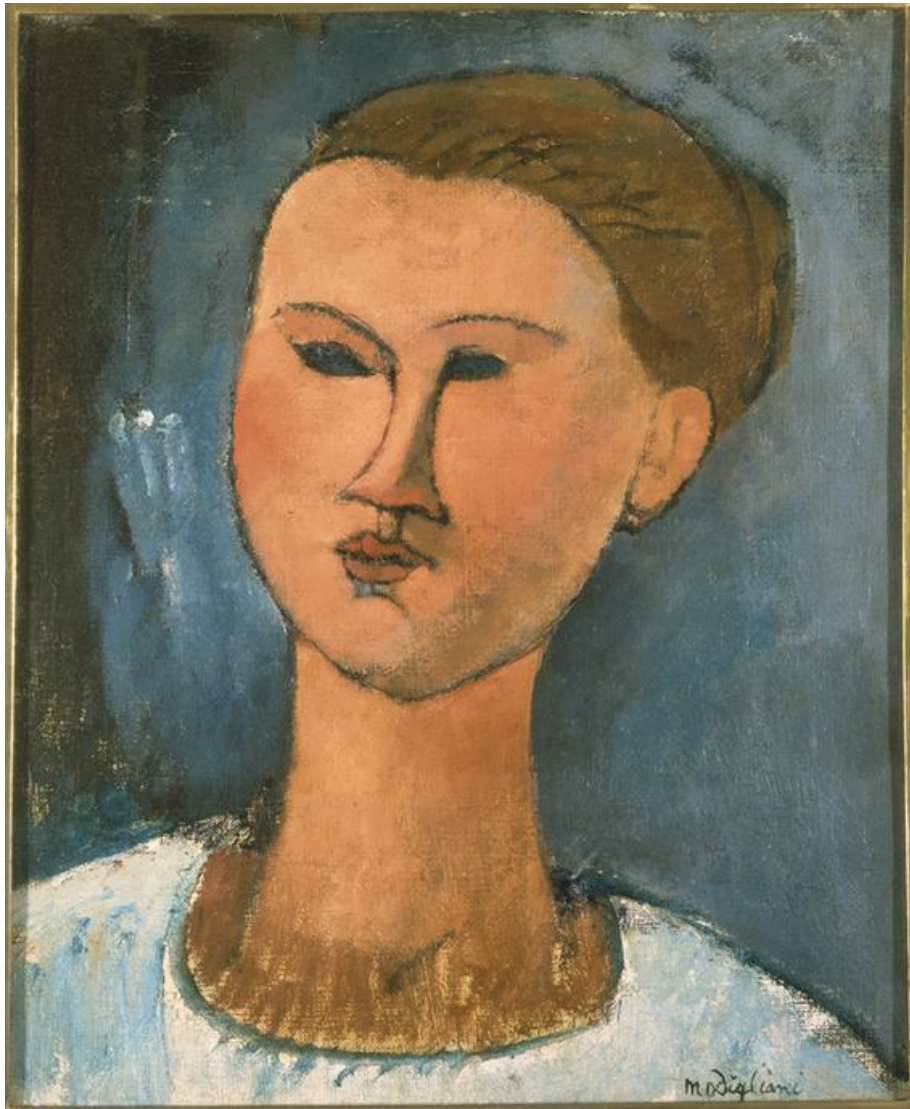


Figure 36. Amedeo Modigliani. *Head of a Woman*, 1915. Oil on canvas. 46 x 38 cm. Pinacoteca di Brera, Milano.



Figure 37. Amedeo Modigliani. *A Woman*, 1917-1920. Oil on canvas. 60.33 x 46.36 cm. The Detroit Institute of Arts, Detroit.



Figure 38. Gabriele Münter. *The Russian's House* (*Das Münter Haus in Murnau*), 1931. Oil on canvas. 42.5 x 57 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich.



Figure 39. Gabriele Münter. *The Way to Fürstalm*, 1931. Oil on illustration board. 43 x 32 cm. Private collection.

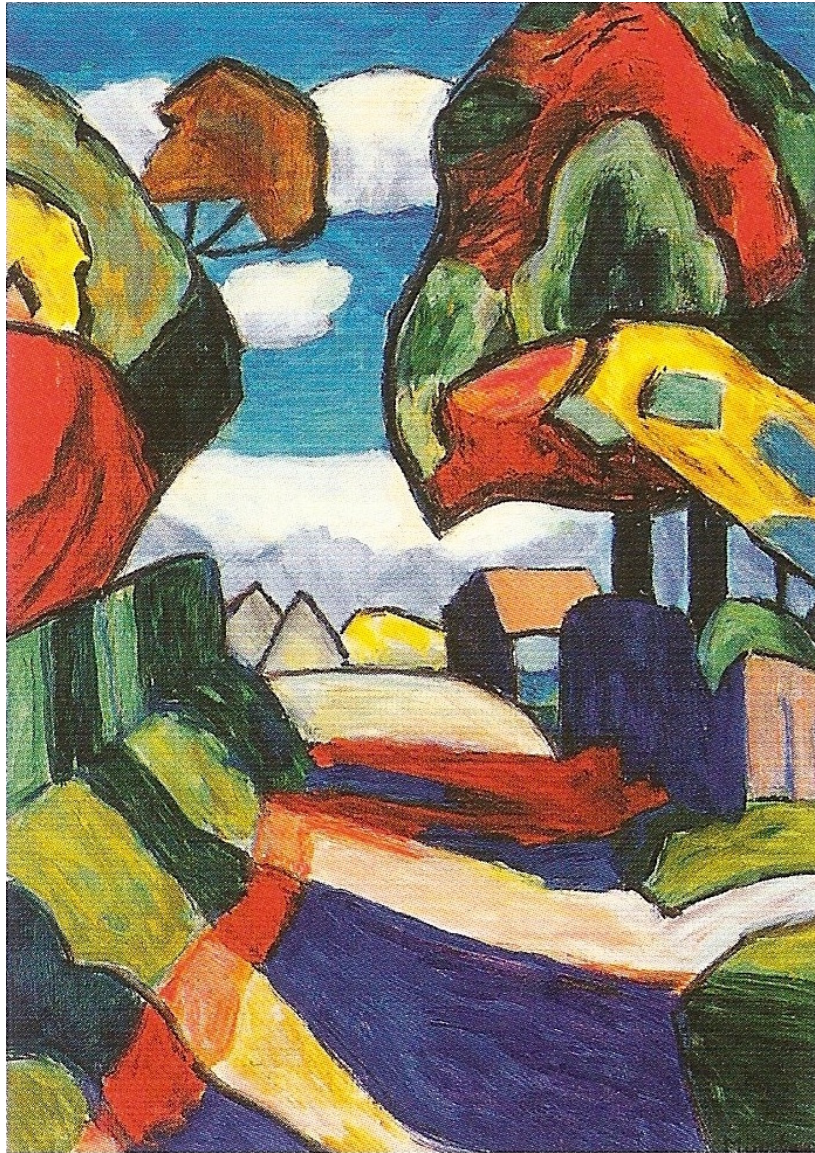


Figure 40. Gabriele Münter. *Weg im bunten Oktober*, 1959. Oil on canvas. 57 x 40 cm. Milwaukee Art Museum, Milwaukee.

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Figures

1. Gabriele Münter. *Still Life, Red*, 1909. Oil on cardboard, 53 x 39 cm. Private collection. Reproduced in Reinhold Heller, *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 88.
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5. Gabriele Münter. *Portrait of Marianne von Werefkin*, 1909. Oil on cardboard, 37.5 x 44.5 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich. Reproduced in Peter Lahnstein, *Münter* (Neuberg and Oberammergau: Buch-Kunstverlag Ettal, 1971), 11.
6. Gabriele Münter. *Boating*, 1910. Oil on canvas, 125.1 x 73.3 cm. Milwaukee Art Museum, Gift of Mrs. Harry Lynde Bradley. Reproduced in Reinhold Heller, *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 125.
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10. Gabriele Münter. *Country House (Kandinsky in the Garden)*, 1912. Oil on cardboard, 33 x 40.7 cm. Private collection. Reproduced in Reinhold Heller, *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 100.
11. Gabriele Münter. *Self Portrait in Front of an Easel*, 1909. Oil on canvas, 75 x 57.5 cm. Princeton Art Museum, Princeton University. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Frank E. Taplin, Jr. Reproduced in Reinhold Heller, *Gabriele Münter: The Years of Expressionism 1903-1920* (New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1997), 120.

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26. Gabriele Münter. *Kandinsky and Bossi at the Table*, 1912. Oil on canvas, 95 x 125.5 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich. Author's photograph.
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28. Henri Matisse. *Interior with Violin Case*, 1918-1919. Oil on canvas, 73 x 60 cm. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Reproduced in Patrick Coleman, ed., *The Art of Music* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015), 264.
29. Gabriele Münter. *Kater und Hut (Tomcat and Hat)*, 1930. Oil on canvas, 64.5 x 49.5 cm. Private Collection. Reproduced in Karoline Hille, *Gabriele Münter: Die Künstlerin mit der Zauberhand* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag GmbH & Co., 2012), 171.
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33. Gabriele Münter. *Unvergleichlich (Die Dichterin Sylvia von Harden)*, 1926/28. Pencil drawing, 29 x 22 cm. Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, Munich. Reproduced in Karoline Hille, *Gabriele Münter: Die Künstlerin mit der Zauberhand* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag GmbH & Co., 2012), 163.
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39. Gabriele Münter. *The Way to Fürstalm*, 1931. Oil on illustration board, 43 x 32 cm. Private collection. Reproduced in Karoline Hille, *Gabriele Münter: Die Künstlerin mit der Zauberhand* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag GmbH & Co., 2012), 180.
40. Gabriele Münter. *Weg im bunten Oktober*, 1959. Oil on canvas, 57 x 40 cm. Milwaukee Art Museum, Mrs. Harry Lynde Bradley Collection. Reproduced in Karoline Hille, *Gabriele Münter: Die Künstlerin mit der Zauberhand* (Köln: DuMont Buchverlag GmbH & Co., 2012), 220.

Curriculum Vitae

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